

## Sinister Wisdom 74



*I am a lesbian. My life, my body and my desires belong to me.  
Soy lesbiana por mariana pessah*

# Latina Lesbians



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*Sinister Wisdom* is a multicultural, multi-class, female-born lesbian space. We seek to open, consider and advance the exploration of community issues. We recognize the power of language to reflect our diverse experiences and to enhance our ability to develop critical judgment, as lesbians evaluating our community and our world. Statements made and opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher, board members or editor(s) of *Sinister Wisdom*.

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# A Journal by and for Lesbians

## Contents

Juanita Ramos.....	Notes for a Magazine.....	4
Juanita Ramos.....	Notas para una revista.....	5
Maya Chinchilla.....	Home Girl.....	6
Chastity Rodríguez.....	Flight.....	7
Norma Mogrovejo.....	¿Literatura lésbica o lesboerotismo? El caso de México.....	8
T. Jackie Cuevas.....	Lost People: Chapter One.....	14
Cristina Izaguirre.....	Passing Stranger.....	17
Rosita Ángulo Libre de Marulanda.....	La partida/The Parting.....	20
Lidia Tirado Tirado.....	Porque el problema es de fondo y no nada mas de forma.....	23
Patricia Karina Vergara Sánchez.....	India.....	27
Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa.....	Del otro lado.....	30
Yarimee Gutiérrez.....	CamaLEÓN.....	32
Nicole Esquibel.....	Masks.....	36
Randi M. Romo.....	Butch with a Capital "B".....	38
Patricia Contreras Flores.....	Signos or signs that I was a closeted Brown girl.....	40
mariana pessah.....	La sal de la vida.....	41
Alina Galliano.....	I.....	44
Miriam Zoila Pérez.....	Black Tie Blues.....	45
Edith Bucio.....	Siempre chillando.....	48
Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso.....	La fobia que hay en mi.....	53
oneangrygirlfag.....	Skirts.....	56
Yesiga López.....	Rara y atrabancada.....	57
Ty González.....	Because My Mother Taught Me How to Love Women.....	60
Janette Álvarez.....	Madre mía/ Mother of Mine.....	65
Myra López.....	Precious Mother.....	67
Lea E. Arellano.....	Mamá When You Danced.....	68
Cathy Arellano.....	Casanova.....	70
L. Vera.....	Marilu.....	73
Andrea Dulanto.....	Not a Virgin.....	75
Griselda Suárez.....	Lover's Delight.....	81
Daisy Hernández.....	Shorty.....	82
Elena Madrigal.....	Pensión de viudez.....	86
María Teresa Escolán Nuila.....	Bendita eres.....	88



Marta Collazo.....	Untitled.....	90
Claudia Narváez-Meza.....	viernes silencioso.....	91
Griselda Suárez.....	Serpent Street Kiss.....	92
Doris Moromisato.....	Mariposa.....	93
Mariana Romo-Carmona.....	Idílio.....	94
Nelsy Aldebot Reyes.....	Declaración de amor.....	97
Erika Almenara.....	La brevedad de la materia.....	99
Soad Grayeb.....	Te extraño.....	106
Odette Alonso.....	Romanza del amor raro.....	107
María Amparo Jiménez.....	Melancolía.....	108
María Ysabel.....	¡Quisiera estar allí!.....	109
Artemisa Téllez.....	Verte.....	109
Mónica M. Rivera Colón.....	Blanqui.....	110
Milka Ramírez.....	En esta eternidad.....	112
Nancy Lorenza Green.....	When Two Angels Love Each Other.....	114
Mayra Lazara Dole.....	¡Guerrillera, Tortillera Estyle!.....	115
Renée (Stephens) Araña.....	El primer amor.....	119
Maritza Nazario.....	My Twisted Similes.....	122
Luz María (Luzma) Umpierre.....	Bella ilusión que fugaz.....	123
Nicole Marie López.....	One Miraculous Day.....	125
Mercedes Alba.....	María.....	131
Mercedes Alba.....	En Tijuana.....	131
Lucy Marrero.....	The Microcosm of a Culture of Domination and Oppression.....	132
Randi M. Romo.....	Rainbow Angels.....	137
Glorya F. Cabrera.....	Baywood Elementary School Circa 1972.....	141
T. Jackie Cuevas, Mayra Lazara Dole, Cristina Izaguirre, Rosita Ángulo Libre de Marulanda, Nicole Marie López..... Lesbian Activism is.....		
		145
Gloria Careaga, Marlene Molina S. (Chispa), Nadia Rosso, Leni Rivera..... Activismo lésbico es.....		
		147
Comunidad Mujeres Creando..... Mujeres Creando comunidad.....		
		149
Antonieta Gimeno..... “¡Escucha, escucha, estamos en la lucha!”: A Mexicana-Salvadoreña Lesbian’s Road to Activism.....		
		151
Ana-Maurine Lara.....	The Point that is My Pen.....	156
Nadia Rosso.....	El por qué del Carnaval.....	161
Gabriela Robledo..... El recorrido de derechos civiles: Inteligibilidad lesbiana y lucha política.....		
		164



Verónica Reyes.....	A Controlled Experiment: my upstairs people.....	169
Patricia Karina Vergara Sánchez.....	Ética y buenas costumbres.....	171
Avotcja.....	La voz de María (Maria's Voice).....	174
Dinapiera Di Donato.....	Sargento Josanna Jeffrey.....	176
Anel I. Flores.....	Mi Abuelita's Café.....	179
Alicia Gaspar de Alba.....	Yolanda the Terrible (1947-2007).....	181
Rose M. Santos-Cunningham.....	a butterfly.....	182
Zemaya Martínez.....	Renacimiento de una bruja.....	183
Camila.....	Reencarnaremos.....	189
Contributor's Notes.....		190

## ART

mariana pessah.....	Soy lesbiana.....	Front Cover
Ana Lilia Salinas.....	A Break in the Wall.....	39
Ana Lilia Salinas.....	Deseo.....	39
mariana pessah.....	Atrapador de sueños.....	41
Carmen N. Rodríguez.....	Identity.....	59
Anna-Marie López.....	Self-Portrait.....	64
Carmen N. Rodríguez.....	The Virgin.....	80
Ana Lilia Salinas.....	Luz in the Universe.....	98
Anna-Marie López.....	The Bath.....	106
Rotmi Enciso.....	Cruces.....	131
mariana pessah.....	Mi cuerpo es mío.....	140
mariana pessah.....	Juanita y Ochy cantando (Juanita Ramos y Ochy Curiel).....	145
Nadia Rosso.....	Grupo Lésbico Universitario.....	161
Angela Brinskele.....	Yolanda Retter Vargas at UCLA.....	181
Lucia Martinez.....	Songs of the Elders.....	188
Peri Labeyrie.....	Remeras inteligentes.....	Back Cover

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## Notes for a Magazine

This issue of *Sinister Wisdom* is dedicated to: the memory of all the Latina\* lesbians who have come before us; incarcerated women, who comprise a third of *Sinister Wisdom's* readership; and those who, inside or outside the closet, continue to struggle around the world for our voices to be heard and our rights respected.

Twenty-one years have passed since I published the first edition of *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)* (1987). While the first issue included the words of 47 women born in 10 countries and the third edition (2004) those of 63 women born in 15 countries, this issue of *Sinister Wisdom* is equally diverse bringing together 79 women born in 12 Latin American countries and the U.S. It is an honor for me at this time to once again gather together the voices of so many Latina lesbians.

Much has happened since the first edition of *Compañeras* was published. Latina lesbian groups have been formed, at one time or another, in the U.S. and in all but a few of the 19 Spanish-speaking countries in the "Western Hemisphere." Latina lesbians are now visible in a host of local, national, and international civil and human rights struggles of which the lesbian and gay rights movement is only one. They have formed and joined organizations, grassroots coalitions, and international communications networks, participated in the organizing of feminist and lesbian feminist *encuentros* in Latin America and the Caribbean, and created women's studies programs, research centers, and NGOs. An increasing number document our histories via the printed media and the arts, thus, increasing the wealth of information available to all of us. While some have run for political office and sought the passage of lesbian and gay rights bills and the elimination of discriminatory laws, others have joined radical revolutionary movements seeking the overthrow of oppressive regimes. Their actions have been as varied as their personalities and personal circumstances allow. Latina lesbian activism has flourished with great enthusiasm, devotion, sometimes anger, but much more frequently, love.

It is in a spirit of solidarity with all oppressed peoples and the conviction that one day good *will* triumph over evil, that I and the contributors share our voices with all of you.

**Juanita Ramos**  
**Manhattan, NY, August 2008**

\* As here used, the term includes women of Latin American birth or parentage throughout the world.

## Notas para una revista

Este ejemplar de *Sinister Wisdom* está dedicado a la memoria de todas las lesbianas latinas\* que nos han precedido, las mujeres encarceladas que componen una tercera parte de las lectoras de *Sinister Wisdom*, y a aquellas que, desde dentro y fuera del armario (*closet*), continúan luchando en el mundo para que nuestras voces sean escuchadas y nuestros derechos, respetados.

Hace 21 años publiqué la primera edición de *Compañeras: Latina lesbians (An Anthology)* (1987). Mientras la primera edición incluyó las palabras de 47 mujeres nacidas en diez países, y la tercera edición (2004), la de 63 mujeres nacidas en 15 países, este ejemplar de *Sinister Wisdom* es igual de variado al unir las voces de 79 mujeres nacidas en 12 países latinoamericanos y los Estados Unidos. Es para mí un gran honor una vez más poder exponerles a las voces de tantas lesbianas latinas.

Mucho ha pasado desde la publicación de la primera edición de *Compañeras*. Grupos de lesbianas latinas se han formado, en algún momento u otro, en casi todos los 19 países latinoamericanos y en Estados Unidos. Las lesbianas latinas ahora son visibles en numerosas luchas por los derechos civiles y humanos a nivel local, nacional e internacional, de los cuales el movimiento por los derechos de las lesbianas y los gays es solamente una. Han formado organizaciones, coaliciones y redes de comunicación. Han participado en la organización de encuentros feministas y lesbico-feministas en América Latina y el Caribe, y han creado programas de estudios de la mujer, centros de investigación y ONGS. Un número creciente documenta nuestras historias por medio de las artes y la escritura, aumentando la riqueza de información disponible a todas nosotras. Mientras algunas se han postulado para puestos políticos y han buscado derogar leyes discriminatorias y pasar leyes para proteger a las lesbianas y a los gays, otras han formado parte de movimientos radicales revolucionarios para derrocar gobiernos opresivos. Sus acciones han variado tanto como sus personalidades y sus circunstancias personales les han permitido. El activismo de las lesbianas latinas ha florecido con gran entusiasmo, devoción, a veces con rabia, pero mucho más frecuentemente con amor.

Es en este espíritu de solidaridad con tod@s l@s oprimid@s y la convicción de que un día el bien *triunfará* sobre el mal, que las contribuyentes y yo compartimos nuestras voces con tod@s ustedes.

**Juanita Ramos**  
**Manhattan, NY, agosto 2008**

\* El término incluye a aquellas compañeras de nacimiento o descendencia latinoamericana en todo el mundo.

## Home Girl

*Maya Chinchilla*

You  
bring out the homegirl in me  
The one who has your back  
My inner cha-cha chola.  
The big hoop girl  
burgundy lips and sticky gloss kisses

The chingona intellectual  
Who'd write the hoochie feminist manifesto  
And who'd cut a *bitch* just to see you again.

La "*Sí pues,  
vos sos mía! a la gran púchica!*"

That broke ass love  
That novela chick that keeps coming back  
The "*If I can't have you then no one can!*"

That gender deviant femme drama and butcha trauma  
The diego *and* the frida  
The ones your mama warned you about

The steam from that jungle heat  
The jaguar queen and jade obsidian

The social butterfly turned homebody  
The queztal bird's necessary freedom-  
I'd give it to you

Cause homegirl  
You bring out  
That puta-madre-más-cabrona-punk-ass-bitch that don't need nobody  
But just  
has  
to have you.



# Flight

*Chastity Rodríguez*

Puerto Rican parrot in your gilded cage, take flight!  
Rely not on hand fed morsels of the good life  
Instead  
Recapture your true nature and  
Risk the wild

Rely on the instincts  
That have grown dull with disuse  
Trust them again and  
Seek sustenance of your own choosing

Remember your other roots  
The front stoops of public housing  
Where amongst the street-savvy pigeons  
You first learned to fly  
Shedding the dulled, dirty grey of your mask  
For the flashing greens, blues, reds and yellows of your essence

Revisit that stoop  
Share your adventures, your lessons  
And watch  
As another Puerto Rican parrot in disguise  
Takes flight!

## ¿Literatura lésbica o lesboerotismo? El caso de México

*Norma Mogrovejo*

El objeto de esta ponencia es reflexionar sobre algunos conceptos que involucran la literatura lésbica. Más que establecer límites y etiquetas a los estilos literarios, propongo una serie de preguntas que cuestionan conceptos dados por hechos en torno las identidades genéricas y sexuales, y acercarnos someramente a la construcción de un **yo lesbiano** desde la narrativa.

**¿Qué es la literatura lésbica? ¿Podemos hablar de una literatura lésbica?** Angélica Tornero (2001) en su artículo “Literatura homosexual”, la define como aquella escrita por hombres y mujeres homosexuales y heterosexuales que tratan el tema de manera explícita. Esta definición involucra 1) al/la autor/autora y 2) el tema explícito. ¿Podríamos afirmar que se trata de literatura lésbica aquella escrita por cualquier persona siempre y cuando se trate del tema? ¿A que se refiere Tornero cuando menciona “el tema” de manera explícita?

En las últimas décadas hemos leído novelas donde de manera transversal algún personaje femenino, tiene una experiencia lésbica con otra mujer. No siempre se trata de una historia de amor entre dos mujeres. La mayoría de las veces se trata de una experiencia sexual, cuando no amorosa, que si bien cuestiona o no al personaje, ella retorna a su vida heterosexual. La hegemonía heterosexual es cuestionada pero la resistencia no es suficiente para resquebrajarla, triunfa la heterosexualidad. ¿Estaríamos hablando en estos casos de literatura lésbica?

Para precisar términos: **¿Quién es una lesbiana? ¿Cómo se define una lesbiana? ¿Por una o más experiencias sexuales o amorosas?** El término lesbianismo aparece en el contexto mexicano en 1975 gracias al movimiento feminista, en la *Conferencia por el Año Internacional de la Mujer* (Mogrovejo 2000). Anteriormente la denominación usada era “homosexuales femeninos”. La irrupción de un movimiento social que reivindicaba el orgullo de ser lesbiana y el sentido político del mismo, dió al concepto lesbianismo además de un sentido identitario, una significación profundamente política, una identidad en resistencia a un poder hegemónico: “la heterosexualidad obligatoria” (Rich 1980). “Las lesbianas son mujeres cuyos principales intereses eróticos y emocionales están dirigidos a otras mujeres, aunque no estén abiertamente expresados. Las lesbianas atentan directa y radicalmente contra el sistema establecido a partir de su negativa a cumplir el papel que socialmente les está asignado” afirma Victoria Sau (1979: 21). La definición incluye además del género, la sexualidad y la subjetividad, un elemento político, las lesbianas atentan al sistema patriarcal. Para Marcela Lagarde:

el lesbianismo es un desconocimiento al poder de los hombres y es trasgresor porque significa una opción, un acto de elección y abandono al destino natural. Por eso es un acto de significación política, tanto como por el atentado al poder patriarcal que consagra lo fálico como lo erótico para las mujeres, como porque posibilita un paso en la constitución de las mujeres en protagonistas en un ámbito de complejidad política. Como un rechazo a la interacción erótica con lo masculino, el lesbianismo es un no a la cultura erótica dominante y es un sí – real y simbólico – de la mujer a lo propio (1990: 217).

**Entonces ¿es posible concebir a una lesbiana como cualquier mujer que tiene relaciones sexuales con otra mujer y llega a enamorarse de ella?** Hasta hace poco, la referencia a una práctica sexual o genérica podía definir un posicionamiento de vida, así, los insultos a quienes escapaban a las reglas genéricas estigmatizaban a la persona en una identidad “perversa”, tal vez no asumida o no propia. Tanto las feministas como sexólogos cuestionaron el principio esencialista de “la biología es destino” y con ello la división opresiva de género producto de una morfología. En tanto, la emergencia de nuevas masculinidades y feminidades aparecen como posibilidades de transformación.

Investigaciones sobre sexualidad y SIDA han demostrado que las prácticas sexuales no definen necesariamente una identidad. La existencia de un número elevado de hombres con prácticas sexuales homoeróticas pero reafirmados en su identidad heterosexual, replanteó las estrategias para la prevención de la enfermedad pero también los ámbitos de la identidad y la necesidad de distinguir entre prácticas sexuales e identidades sexuales.

La identidad sexual como concepto ha sido rechazada por un sector del movimiento lésbico porque puede remitir a un ámbito naturalista o instrumentos de regímenes reguladores. Sin embargo, es un concepto absolutamente indispensable que ofrece un sentido personal, ubicación social y compromiso político. Quizá algunos digan “soy heterosexual”, pues es un valor que se da por descontado. Pero decir “soy gay” o “soy lesbiana” es declarar una pertenencia, y asumir una postura específica en relación a los códigos sexuales dominantes. Tales identidades son cultural e históricamente específicas, seleccionadas entre una multitud de posibles identidades sociales, no atribuibles a un impulso o deseo sexual; pero no son partes esenciales de nuestra personalidad. Cada vez somos más conscientes de que la sexualidad es tanto un producto de la naturaleza, de la lengua y la cultura. Y nos esforzamos por fijarla, establecerla, decir a través de nuestro sexo quiénes somos (Weeks 2000).

Con las formas de vida con que hemos crecido y que han acuñado nuestra identidad, asumimos clases muy distintas de responsabilidad histórica. Las identidades no sólo implican la diferenciación, involucra modificaciones,



rupturas y estructuración de nuevas identidades, es decir, reconocimiento, reafirmación, conciencia, compromiso y transformación (Valenzuela 1993).

La identidad sexual no hace referencia a una obsesión personal por el sexo, sino, una resistencia a los principios organizativos de una sociedad que jerarquiza hasta los ámbitos de la sexualidad. De ahí que para las activistas asumir la identidad lésbica es un acto político que atenta las estructuras de una sociedad heterosexista.

Las identidades sexuales son decisiones adoptadas con libertad. La lesbiana adquiere conciencia de su diferencia a la que asigna ciertos significados: Ser lesbiana es una elección; al tomar esta identificación, se eliminan las otras formas posibles, la ausencia de estas otras formas es lo que le da forma a la lesbiana (de la Tierra 2002).

La identidad es un valor que implica un posicionamiento, “soy”. “Soy lesbiana” es la afirmación de una existencia que salió del silencio, un no a la imposición milenaria y un sí a una voz propia. Pero las lesbianas carecemos de tradición y de discurso acerca de nuestro pasado reciente. Con la aparición de la segunda ola del movimiento feminista (finales de los '60) empezamos a organizarnos y todavía estamos tratando de recuperar una historia, un lenguaje, un cuerpo e intentando definir quiénes somos. Entonces **¿podríamos denominar lésbicas a las novelas que relatan historias sexuales entre mujeres?**

El erotismo entre mujeres ha sido un estilo literario recurrente dedicado muchas veces a exaltar la morbosidad de una sociedad de doble moral. También, y quizá sin quererlo, muestra una realidad de marginación y exclusión. **¿Cuándo hablar entonces de literatura lésbica o lesboerotismo?** Entendido en su contexto histórico, lo lésbico remite a un sentido político porque se trata de una resistencia a un sistema de poder opresivo la heterosexualidad obligatoria.

**¿Importa aquí, ahora, quién escribe sobre lesbianas para “etiquetar” la obra como “literatura lésbica”?** Podríamos inferir que literatura lesbiana es toda aquella que da cuenta de un sistema de opresión basada en la heterosexualidad obligatoria, no importando la voz del/la autor/autora. Sin embargo, esa historia de silencio, exclusión, negación y persecución exige hilvanar un pasado y narrar un presente desde la primera voz, el **yo lesbiano**. Así, la literatura lésbica es además, documento histórico que da cuenta de conflictividades, resistencias, historias cotidianas personales y colectivas.

**Narrativa desde el yo lesbiano.** Asumiendo la limitación de no ser una literata o una crítica de literatura, buscar literatura lésbica que hablara desde ese **yo lesbiano**, fue más complicado que el planteamiento teórico. La narrativa escrita desde el **yo lesbiano** en México es sumamente exigua, no así la poesía. La escasa producción de narrativa lésbica muestra que el miedo sigue actuando como un policía interno. A las lesbianas nos da aún miedo hablar y mucho más trabajo escribir. Aunado a ello, las posibilidades de publicación están limitadas a una valoración de la estética con marcos de

referencia androcéntricos. Presento un somero recorrido por cinco autoras que reivindican un **yo lesbiano**, no porque sean las únicas ni las más representativas, claras en su elección, sino porque el **yo lesbiano** es el punto central del dilema, un ovillo suficientemente fuerte para tejer una historia propia.

La primera novela que abre la corriente del **yo lesbiano** es *Amora*, de Rosa María Roffiel. Terminada en 1983 y primero publicada en 1989, está escrita con el telón de fondo de un movimiento feminista y lésbico gay, que expresa orgullosa la voz de un **yo lesbiano**. Guadalupe es una activista, dispuesta a cambiar el mundo, que se enamora de una heterosexual. Conciente del conflicto afirma: “Las bugas son tan machas como los machos, tienen los mismos complejos, las mismas fobias, y por eso debe huirse de ellas” (123), pero pronto sucumbe al amor. Claudia quién reivindica la poligamia no deja de frecuentar a sus amantes hombres, lo que provoca arrebatos de celos en Guadalupe.

El conflicto central gira en torno a la indecisión de Claudia respecto a la identidad lésbica, ser o no ser. Rupturas y reencuentros hacen una cadena de conflictos que termina en un final feliz, liman asperezas (Trejo 2001). Hay un gran interés de la autora por escudriñar en ese **yo lesbiano**, ¿quiénes son?, ¿cómo se elige esa condición?, ¿qué las lleva hasta ahí?, ¿cómo se reconocen?, ¿cómo se enamoran?, ¿cuáles son sus preocupaciones? *Amora* es un documento que da cuenta de un momento histórico donde los conceptos en torno a la sexualidad y el género cambian gracias a la efervescencia de los movimientos sociales.

*Dos Mujeres*, de Sara Levi Calderón (1990), muestra un **yo lesbiano** en el marco de una persecución familiar: atentados, agresiones físicas y la amenaza de desheredar a la protagonista; Valeria, judía, madre de dos hijos y divorciada. Finalmente, se van a vivir a París donde después de algunos años, Genovesa la abandona por un hombre. Años después vuelve a visitarla pero la encuentra muerta. *Dos mujeres* es una tragedia épica de violencia y exclusión en un mundo privilegiado donde París puede ofrecer un autoexilio.

*Con fugitivo paso* (1997), Victoria Enríquez presenta ocho cuentos lésbicos que hilvanan parte de esa historia extraviada, voltean en ese pasado incierto y construyen un mito fundacional. Poética, con cinismo y sentido del humor inventa un **yo lesbiano** en el mundo prehispánico, en la antigua Grecia, durante la revolución zapatista y en el siglo XVII. Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz junto a la virreyna, atravesando el tiempo, en una noche de reventón acompañan a Angélica María a Acapulco.

Reyna Barrera en 2001 publica *Sandra: Secreto amor*. Es una novela que aunque no presenta una conflictividad central, un nudo, como acostumbra la literatura convencional, inserta a Ramona y Sandra en un mundo artístico y cultural donde el mal carácter de Ramona pone en ciertas situaciones de crisis a la pareja. Una posible explicación constructivista de que el género se fija con anterioridad al nacimiento, esclarecería las características de la



protagonista: un nombre masculino asignado en la gestación de la madre como deseo de un hijo varón. La novela dibuja roles sociales del mundo heterosexual transportados al mundo lésbico. La dominante, proveedora, que define los conflictos, masculina por supuesto, y la femenina, artista, delicada, sensible, prudente. La vida lésbica no es en sí ni por sí revolucionaria. Los roles de *butch-fem* fortalecen estructuras de poder y jerarquías. En uno de los últimos cuentos de *Con fugitivo paso*, la autora hace sorna de una *butch* esclavizada por una *fem*.

Rescato en este brevísimo recuento a Odette Alonso. Aún inéditos, llegaron a mis manos dos de sus cuentos: “Las dos caras de la luna” y “Con la boca abierta”. Odette rescata ese **yo lesbiano** orgulloso, definido, sin lugar a dudas y con sentido del humor; aguda e inteligente pero se enamora de la persona equivocada, una buga. En “Las dos caras de la luna”, un cuento largo o breve noveleta, Andrea se enamora de su compañera de trabajo Selena, quién está casada. El marido sale del país y ellas inician un romance que es interrumpido a su retorno. Desafiar las fronteras de la heterosexualidad puede traer consecuencias muy graves y lo deja ver en el final de “Con la boca abierta”, cuando el marido se queda con la boca abierta al encontrarlas haciendo el amor. Pero Andrea no se derrumba porque tiene la solidaridad de Marina, su amiga. Odette rescata la fuerza solidaria de las mujeres, un poder que impulsa a la vida.

Las cinco autoras construyen un **yo lesbiano colectivo** preocupado por articular una o varias historias donde las lesbianas puedan encontrar un sentido de referencia, un pasado que aporte a entender el presente y visionar el futuro.

El enfrentamiento a la norma heterosexual reafirma un **yo lesbiano**. Sin embargo, enamorarse de una heterosexual se convierte en un argumento recurrente donde el conflicto, si bien dramático en la literatura previa a *Amora*, (aún lo vemos en *Dos mujeres*), ya no acaba con la vida. “Si se va nuevamente no me derrumbaré... hay recursos y manos amorosas, que siempre te van a levantar, te pase lo que te pase” dice Amora (Roffiel 1999: 186).

El **yo lesbiano** trasgrede uno de los pilares del patriarcado: la heterosexualidad obligatoria, no así la monogamia obligatoria, otro de los pilares de la sociedad patriarcal. Los marcos de referencia de una relación amorosa están muy cercanos a los heterosexuales: relaciones de posesión, propiedad, celos, la infidelidad, violencia, como conflicto épico. No hemos sido capaces de escapar a esos valores que refuerzan nuestra propia opresión. Aún cuando la literatura es expresión de una realidad, desearíamos la invitación de ficciones que construyan otras formas de relación cuyos valores no estén centrados en la heterosexualidad ni la monogamia obligatoria. Se trata de inventar la literatura y también la realidad lésbica.

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## Lost People: Chapter One

*T. Jackie Cuevas*

Adam. I lost you  
on the eve your house & your little sister  
burned down  
cuz Sears sold your mama  
flammable children's curtains  
& Sears had to give your parents  
4 million dollars and you  
took that money  
and rose up  
from the ashes of the barrio  
and I lost you.

Frankie. I lost you  
in your flaming red sequin dress  
you disappeared  
we searched for weeks and weeks  
but nobody had seen a lost transie  
then a body washed up  
under the Harbor Bridge  
and they found you  
and I lost you.

Annette. I almost lost you  
when the faggot-haters  
on the football team  
held you down &  
beat you  
but you survived  
then I lost you again  
cuz you loved being coked up  
more than you loved anything  
including yourself  
and I lost you.

Raul. I lost you  
cuz I got tired  
of your I'm-gonna-get-outta-this-town  
bullshit stories and dead dreams



and I lost you  
on purpose.

Popo. I lost you  
when you went looking for yourself  
in the eyes of every woman, any woman  
except the ones  
that counted on you  
and I lost you.

Father. I lost you  
before I was even born  
cuz you were  
too young / too scared  
and you decided  
my mama was  
too Mexican / too poor / too much trouble  
and I lost you.

Husband-man. I lost you  
cuz  
I *had* to –  
you were  
just like my father.

Grandma. You drank away your soul  
until you lost yourself  
and I lost you.

Aunt Helen. I lost you  
at the dance hall.  
You got up to dance  
you were reaching  
for Tio's hand &  
your glittery gold heels  
slipped & your head  
hit the floor & burst open  
as wide as your generous heart  
and I lost you.

Mama. I thought I lost you  
when you went to prison

thank god you came back.  
I hope *you* haven't lost you.

David. 18 on your motorcycle  
no helmet & swerving fast in the storm &  
that truck didn't see you  
but nobody ever really saw you  
while you were alive  
rain, truck, bike, body  
and I lost you.

My Lost People:  
Walk with me  
Walk with me in the spirit  
give me your  
burnt barrios-abuse-heart attacks-wino love-suicide  
I will carry.

I will pick up where you left off  
and I will learn to  
wear my helmet  
lay off the liquor  
stay in my own bed  
honor love and give love  
tell my truth  
loud and bold  
and I will stop  
losing  
my Self.

## Passing Stranger

For Yani

*Cristina Izaguirre*

*Passing Stranger you do not know how longingly I look upon you... All is recall'd as we flit by each other, fluid, affectionate, chaste, matured, You grew up with me, were a boy with me or a girl with me...*

– Walt Whitman\*

To the girl riding the 2/3 Line  
the color of a thousand summers...

I kept stealing glances at you  
watching you cradle that  
textbook on your thighs  
bringing the words on the page  
to rest heavy on your brow.

What dreams lay in between your  
temples and the soft wisps of your hair?  
Who grew you up?

Did you come to  
Los Estados Unidos at age 6  
With promises of the prettiest dolls  
A winter wonderland complete with  
Techni-colored Santa Claus & reindeer.

Were you greeted by  
wind cracking your lips  
piss stained staircases  
leaf less trees bent over  
broken people.

Did you grow up like me?  
Skipping over Skittle colored  
Crack vials on 137<sup>th</sup> St & Broadway

Mama warning

**“Don’t touch, those are poison.”**

Did the children taunt you cause you

Didn’t know how to say

“eeehhh ssstem?”

“eeeehhsssstem?”

But you already knew how to say

“Arcoiris”

“Firmamento”

“Revolución.”

Did you grow up asking Mama

“¿Cuándo nos vamos?”

When are we going back home?

Did you fall asleep on those loooong tables

where Mama cut fabric for the factory man

the sounds of hiss from the irons, chemicals, and steam

dancing over your head

The smell still makes you nauseous 20 years later...

Did you grow up listening to RUN DMC

LL Cool J & Queen Latifah

dancing Merengue, eating coquitos

while your best friend Yani braided your hair.

Did you play in fire hydrants

Your brother’s homeboys chasing & teasing you

them big boys with baggy jeans and polo shirts on.

You remember Giovanni

“Serm”

How he would light up the entire neighborhood with

One spray can

That boy was like Michael Angelo

I wondered if when they stabbed him

on that Brooklyn street corner

Did he bleed out *all* of the colors

he held in his heart

or just

red?



You remember Benji  
how his 17 year old body  
laid in that satin lined box  
You swore it was a dream and  
one day he would walk up your block and  
greet you  
with that sunshine smile of his.

Now I see you  
pulling on your Baby Phat hoody  
over your head trying to  
drown out people's chatter  
trying to make sense out of the words  
that laid across that text book  
That World  
You were never meant to survive in.

I wanted to talk to you  
Sing you praises  
for skipping over the traps  
of being hooked on welfare, hooked on drugs, hooked on  
A man, hooked on hopelessness...

Praises Hermana  
for fighting Goliath every time  
You step out your front door.

\*Published in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia, PA: David McKay 1900.

## La partida/The Parting

*Rosita Ángulo Libre de Marulanda*

The dust, made visible by the ray of sunlight coming into my bedroom had become agitated by my mother's sweeping. It was a late afternoon like a thousand others I enjoyed in my native land, a warm tropical afternoon that caressed my skin, a time in which mother finished her commercial labor and commenced her domestic work. The 20 pairs of shoes on the floor soon found their places in the communal shoe rack, leaving the floor ready for cleaning.

Mama was a very serious woman. She was always focused on some task. I used to admire her rapacious style that allowed her to do many things in a zap, although I grew up to waste a great deal of time – perhaps asking the dust and the shoes their permission to move them. I would watch her concurring that her efficacy did not need my help and fully knowing that any intimacy brought about by a shared task would have been unbearable.

After a whole day managing the production of soap in the factory we kept in the back patio, she would cross the middle patio and enter the fold of the abode late afternoon around four to make sure we'd wash off our bodies the muck that had accumulated during a day's play. Thus, she'd make us ready for dinner and to welcome Papa who would soon arrive from his job.

I do not know what month it was that day just that it was sometime between December and February, vacation time that separated one school year from another, the time of year we bathed during warm afternoons. During school months we bathed with cold water at five at the crack of dawn and the bus would drop us home in just about time for dinner with Papa; the school day in Colombia is much longer than it is here in the United States. That's why I'm certain this took place during school vacation a couple of years before migrating.

I was eleven and a half years of age when the sun was on my feet and I observed Mama clean the house as her six youngest washed ourselves in transition from afternoon to evening when her well-deserved rest began and the maternal presence was restored to us.

I do not remember her exact words, but I do remember with clarity the message she pronounced, as well as my reaction because for me, it was as if a bomb had dropped.

The transition of the day, the transition from the pleasure of her proximity to the confusion, and the transition that she was conveying, took me to another space in which everything sounded with an echo and everything looked yellow. The sun, the dust, the shoes, the terracotta tiles and my feet all disappeared. The small squares of her dress pattern, which were white and black, lost their stability. The white turned to yellow and the black began a dance upon her

body like cockroaches moving in multiple directions. I felt dizzy. It was a moment of insanity, I know, in which reality jumped to another plane. My look turned sharp and my eyes focused upon her large belly. In retrospect, I can see the power I exercised in converting her checkered dress design into cockroaches and giving the rest a yellow tint. Reality was intolerable and the escape was worse. Impotent power against death, against partings, against the decisions made by loved ones to whom I owed my life and a piece of bread, impotent over my tender age, my gender, capitalism, and the machismo that surrounded us.

“We are going to the United States,” she told me with unaffected voice. “Nos vamos. We are leaving.”

“We are leaving, we are leaving.” Her words resounded in my mind. This was truly a moment of crisis, of grief; an end to the world I knew was at the horizon. “And, if I don’t wish to go?” But it was best not to formulate that thought because staying in an empty house would have been death. There would be too many partings and I would not survive such a blow. It was decisively a moment of life and death. It was a moment of death in that I was being denied participation in the decision that would alter my life. This was a decree of invisibility, a declaration that extinguished my existence. I could stay behind and die or follow her and live.

Twenty-three years of her giving birth gifted me with 12 brothers and sisters. (This lady did nothing small and the fruits of her womb were upwards of eight pounds, often ten.) The oldest, who was 15 years my senior and already married, opted to remain and continue his life in his beloved country. The youngest, eight years my junior, suffered his first separation from mom at the tender age of three. He was sent with our older sisters already living in New York; this arduous separation lasted until he was five.

I believe the word used in Spanish for birth, “el parto” (parting), refers to the exit from the womb, the first separation between mother and child, the emergence into a new life where the little creature will walk on various paths. “Parto” also means “I take my leave.”

Not that I was happy before Mama’s announcement or that my life till then had been whole. Far from it. I was eyeing leaving home but I was, unlike my 17 year-old sister, too young yet to make such a move. She left home for a sleepover at our aunts’ house and ran away, instead. She was found a few days later in an adjacent town. I was happy to see her again, but sad to see her efforts stymied.

Hearing the news of our leaving for another country trimmed my wings, so to speak. My upset was not so much about leaving as it was about not having a choice. Perhaps if the topic had been discussed at the dinner table it might have eased the blow. We migrated in spurts, in twos and threes. I came on the same plane with my grandmother and a family friend. My parents were the last ones to leave Colombia. They stayed for five years in New York

and returned back home after each of their girls was married – all except my retarded sister – who had been left behind and was not considered marriage material.

My life was truncated. My dreams, which I was beginning to shape, were truncated. My relations with my young school friends and my young neighbors were truncated. My knowledge was truncated at being transplanted into unknown paths that required a new language and new life values. My retarded sister was truncated from my life; she was two years my elder and I would give up my life for her. My heart and my life were truncated.

Perhaps there was a reason for uprooting the whole family, but they never said. I do not believe it was for economic reasons because we had a growing business and Papa had a steady job; we had servants and a respectable social standing. An uncle had been Colombia's consul to Italy. An aunt owned property. We attended the best schools.

The reasons, I believe, had to do more with the family dynamics and with controlling the growing female sexuality. With five girls ranging between the ages of 11 and 17, we were a handful. I think that when my sister ran away from home, it sent our parents a signal. It is not unusual for Hispanic families to send their children abroad in the hopes of modifying their behavior. I think leaving the security of our home country was a desperate measure in coping with the onslaught of estrogen.

Female sexual development seems the more plausible reason for migrating. I, the youngest of the five girls, presented them with the utmost challenge because the elders encountered the little lesbian that I already was at four. At 11, I was just coming of age. I was beginning to hear that in Paris, people of the same gender married and I had developed a crush on Edith Piaf. I was beginning to explore my growing peaches with my little neighbors; one of them had made a pass.

In the States it was much harder to warm up to girls I hardly knew. I missed my classmates. I missed my retarded sister, and I missed my young neighbors the most. School was not the same. I missed the teachers I had known for so many years and had grown to love. Co-ed school was a cultural shock and the behavior between girls and boys was scandalous. My losses were many; my adjustment to the new country was arduous. There seemed to be no relief in sight.



## Porque el problema es de fondo y no nada mas de forma

*Lidia Tirado Tirado*

**Inundan las calles como cucarachas.** Acabo de llegar a Los Angeles. Tenía la impresión de que era un lugar oscuro, frío y lleno de gentes que inundaban las calles como cucarachas. Seres perdidos, que caminaban de un lugar a otro sin rumbo fijo. Pero el agrio olor a orines en las aceras me ubicó en la realidad, y opuestamente a lo que había imaginado, descubro que las calles están desiertas. Solo uno que otro olvidado deambula por las avenidas con la mirada clavada en el pavimento como si buscaran pedazos de vida perdidos durante el camino.

Me siento angustiada. Tengo miedo de tener que salir a ganarme el pan mañana. ¿Qué voy a decir? ¿Me irán a entender con la pobreza de mi inglés? ¿Necesitarán sociólogas que hablen sólo español? La idea de trabajar de mesera, o lavaplatos, o babysitter me aterroriza. ¿Serán suficientes las pocas palabras que mascullo para realizar un trabajo que parece tan simple pero que para mí implica todo un reto? Y es doble el reto: por el idioma y por ser algo que nunca he hecho. Mi experiencia laboral se ha desarrollado solo dentro de la burocracia mexicana. Por desgracia, tengo demasiado tiempo para pensar.

**El recurso de la violencia.** Después de ponerme mis mejores trapos y recorrer las calles durante horas, conseguí trabajo en un restaurante Afgano. Soy mesera, preparo la ensalada, hago el pan, aspiro el lugar, lavo las mesas, sirvo, abro el restaurante, cobro, entre otras cosas. El dueño, un afgano panzón, no hace más que comprar la mercancía y preparar los platillos más sofisticados. Hice una lista con los nombres de todas las cervezas que hay en el restauran. Así, cada vez que los clientes me preguntan, yo saco mi lista y recito el nombre de todas ellas. Cuando alguna lengua-fóbica no logra entenderme, opto por deletrearle el nombre del producto.

No hago otra cosa más que pensar en el Distrito Federal. Hasta siento que se está apoderando de mi un nacionalismo ridículo que sólo sentí, anteriormente en una ocasión. Sucedió la primera vez que vine a los Estados Unidos. Tenía sólo 14 años y me di cuenta con tristeza del choque entre afro-americanos y latinos que provocan entre los marginados, aquellos que tienen el poder con el fin de dividirlos para evitar su organización. Fue la primera vez que sufrí en carne propia el racismo, y también la primera vez que lloré desconsoladamente cuando ví la bandera tricolor con el águila y la serpiente. Y sentí orgullo de pertenecer a una sociedad llena de historia, rica en cultura y sabiduría. Y sentí pena por aquellos que habían sido despojados de sus raíces, de sus leyendas, de sus valores, de su raza. Pero también, debo de reconocer que gracias a ese sufrimiento, adquirí conciencia del papel que podía desempeñar en esta

sociedad. Aprendí que conocimiento es poder. Yo ya me había conformado con la idea de estudiar una carrera corta.

Cuando me enteré de las bajas estadísticas de latinas que logran llegar a la universidad, y caen en la trampa del recurso de la violencia que se les ofrece a los grupos minoritarios como un escape falso para canalizar sus complejos y frustraciones; fue cuando decidí que yo no podía permitir ni aceptar ese juego sucio. Así es que lo primero que hice al regresar a México, fue presentar el examen para ingresar a la preparatoria.

Sigo deprimida. Lo único que me ayuda a subsistir es el recurso de la memoria. Si no fuera por los recuerdos, por la capacidad de los sentidos para revivir con sus colores, con sus sabores, y sus olores las experiencias agradables o desagradables de la vida, creo que no lograríamos sobrevivir los seres humanos. Eso es lo único que está evitando que me hunda en estos momentos en un pozo sin fondo.

**No tengo tiempo libre pero ¿para qué lo quiero sino sé qué hacer con él?** Los fines de semana, trabajo con los seres más desprotegidos de la sociedad: los enfermos mentales. Cuido a unas “niñas discapacitadas” mentalmente. El estar rodeada de dichos seres tan inofensivos ha provocado que mi depresión aumente. Mi resentimiento hacia la sociedad y hacia un Dios al que siempre he cuestionado por dichas injusticias continúa creciendo. No sé cuánto aguante. No tengo ningún tiempo libre. Pero después de todo ¿Para qué lo quiero si no sé que hacer con él?

**Hay locos de miel y hay locos de mierda.** No sé si estoy enloqueciendo. La idea de la locura ha vuelto de nuevo a mis pensamientos. De repente me encontré contándome los dedos compulsiva y desesperadamente como lo hace una de las enfermas de la casa en la que trabajo. Y entonces vino a mi recuerdo la película del cineasta mexicano Humberto Hermosillo: “María de mi Corazón”; que es una crítica a las instituciones mentales en cuanto a cómo en vez de ayudar a los individuos, los perjudican más.

También viene a mi recuerdo la imagen de Cristina. Curiosamente, Cristina es la muchachita que consume más calmantes que ninguna otra de las habitantes de esa casa; y a mi modo de ver y de pensar es la más inteligente. Se puede decir, que es mucho más que algunos de los que yo conozco que andan deambulando por las calles con licencia de “normales”. Es coreana, y fue abandonada en una de esas casas porque los padres no la podían “controlar”. No cabe duda: hay locos de miel y hay locos de mierda. Aguanté seis meses. Creo que fue demasiado.

**Es cuestión de tiempo.** Me acabo de despertar y siento el cuerpo dormido. Intenté levantar un brazo y no pude llevarlo más allá de la altura de mi pecho. No tengo ganas de hablar. No quiero ver a nadie. El agotamiento es demasiado. Estoy trabajando 16 horas diarias; cuatro para dormir y cuatro para tomar camiones y bañarme. Como mientras me transporto a escondidas para que no me multen. Aunque el otro día me llamó la atención un chofer por ir comiendo,

le dije que no estaba haciendo nada en contra de lo prohibido, pues el dibujo tenía una hamburguesa con una cruz y yo iba comiendo manzanas.

Estoy harta de tantas mentiras. Tantas identidades falsas creadas solo para conseguir trabajo. Porque han de saber que según el trabajo que esté buscando, me invento toda una historia de vida relacionada con dicha actividad. Un “ridículum” vitae que no me pertenece. No cabe duda, me he convertido en una artista del hambre en la lucha diaria por la sobrevivencia.

Es la primera vez que me sucede algo así. Me suelto llorando por cualquier cosa, por mínima que esta sea. He decidido convertirme en un ser anónimo. He elegido no tener ninguna amiga o amigo. La razón: tengo miedo a la integración. Mi miedo surgió después de los comentarios de las pocas personas que me preguntan si me gusta Estados Unidos, y de su asombro ante mi respuesta negativa. Entonces, me han dicho que es cuestión de tiempo. Que ya me acostumbraré y que después ni siquiera voy a querer regresar a México. La idea me da escalofríos. ¿Cómo aceptar el modus vivendi de una sociedad a la que siempre he despreciado?

Pero no lograran convencerme. He decidido encerrarme en mi propia coraza. He convertido las paredes de mi cuarto y mi querido baño en mi único refugio seguro. He elegido automarginarme con el propósito de eludir un lavado de cerebro, de evitar caer en la ficticia ilusión del “American way of life” como el modo ideal para vivir. Pero me estoy aislando, y eso duele, y mucho, porque a final de cuentas mi solución resulta también absurda y artificial. Pero en estos momentos, es la única que me funciona.

**Ni por todos los dólares del mundo.** Ahora estoy trabajando en una clínica de terapia física. He tenido varios enfrentamientos con las encargadas del negocio, dos afro-americanas. Me han echado en cara que los latinos solo queremos ganar el dinero fácilmente y sin hacer nada. Y no se muerden la lengua pues ellas se la pasan viendo telenovelas toda la mañana mientras Gail, una vietnamita, y yo nos encargamos del funcionamiento del lugar.

Su coraje hacia mí empezó cuando me escucharon hablar español con los clientes. Yo creo que les dio pánico no poder entender. A partir de allí me empezaron a hacer la vida imposible. Me prohibieron hablar español. Pero no hice caso, y a pesar de que me defendía como mejor podía, seguí trabajando allí. Seguí aceptando de una u otra forma toda esa mierda que me embarraban. Quizás se debió a mi cansancio de andar rodando de trabajo en trabajo en busca de mejores oportunidades. Quizás se debió a la presión de la nueva ley que venía en camino y que complicaría más las cosas para las personas que no teníamos permiso para trabajar. Quizás se debió al profundo estado de depresión en que me encontraba. El caso es que empecé a aceptar cosas que nunca antes había aceptado. Empecé a agachar la cabeza como un ciervo que después de tantos golpes recibidos, llega un momento en que pierde su rigidez.

Fue gracias a que vine a Tijuana a visitar a mi hermana, la que me hizo

recapacitar, y entonces entendí, por qué muchos de los latinos que había conocido y que yo había juzgado en un principio, tenían una actitud tan servil, tan pasiva, tan conformista ante situaciones humillantes.

Fue mi hermana la que me hizo recordar a la mujer que había sido antes de llegar a este país. Aquella que no acepta humillaciones, ni vejaciones, ni por todos los dólares del mundo.

Abandoné la clínica.

**En defensa de mi capacidad de indignación.** Sucedió algo espantoso. Iba caminando por el centro de Los Ángeles cuando vi a un hombre joven que se veía bien vestido tirado en la calle. Parecía como si estuviera muerto. Lo terrible es que la gente pasaba y ni siquiera se molestaban en mirarlo. Su rostro reflejaba sufrimiento. Pero lo peor del caso es que yo también seguí de largo. Sentí una rara sensación dentro de mí, pero preferí ignorarlo.

Llegando a casa, escuché en las noticias lo del terremoto en San Francisco y tampoco sentí nada. Tampoco sentí nada cuando empecé a perder contacto con las pocas amigas que tenía. Tampoco sentí nada ante las pavorosas estadísticas de muertes debidas al SIDA. Fue hasta mi regreso a México, cuando una amiga me comentó que mi cara reflejaba un sentimiento de amargura e indiferencia cuando sentí que algo se movía. Y me di cuenta del grado de deshumanización en el que estaba cayendo. Fue hasta que vi las mantas de los indígenas colgadas de la barda en la Catedral de la Ciudad de México, pidiendo justicia cuando sentí un fuerte sacudón.

Y empecé a recobrar mi capacidad de sentir. Regresé a Estados Unidos con toda esa energía, mi sensibilidad recuperada y la fuerte convicción de que ya nadie me la quitaría. Así llamé desesperada a la policía cuando mi vecina afro-americana empezó a dar alaridos de terror ante la muerte inesperada. Les empecé a hablar a mis niños de la Elementary School sobre el racismo y la discriminación. Que en función de toda una diferencia de sexos, educación, religión, raza, estereotipos, cánones de belleza, modas, color, lenguaje, preferencia sexual etc. la sociedad proyecta toda una práctica de represión. Que estamos tan acostumbrados al lenguaje autoritario que lo que dice el otro es lo que cuenta y no lo que uno dice o piensa. Que cada sociedad crea a los individuos que necesita para sobrevivir y que es muy fácil dejarse conquistar por el oropel de la tecnología y competir entre advenedizos. Y así rescaté y defendí mi capacidad de indignación que creía perdida.



## India.

*Patricia Karina Vergara Sánchez*

Soy india,  
morena, chatade la cara,  
en un país  
obsesivamente racista.

Soy lesbiana,  
en una nación  
que compulsivamente me persigue.

Insisto,  
en la libertad de decidir sobre mi cuerpo,  
en territorio  
de quienes realizan leyes  
que buscan doblegarme.

No creo en su dios,  
aun cuando habito un Estado  
opresivamente católico.

Invoco a las diosas  
dentro de un patriarcado  
que hace miles de años intenta ocultarlas.

Participo en la lucha laboral,  
de un pueblo  
ya comerciado y en las manos del patrón.

Conozco la importancia  
de la labor contestataria  
cuando en mi patria  
se encarcela a quien dice.

Soy antiimperialista  
viviendo al lado de Bush.

Soy gorda,  
en la cuna

de la tortura estética,  
de la anorexia y de la bulimia.

He dado a luz,  
en una era  
que acabó con la esperanza,  
ya hace tiempo.

Le apuesto a la lucha libertaria,  
en el reino del televisor.

Soy pobre,  
en un planeta  
en donde comen migajas  
tantos millones de pobres.

Soy feminista,  
en una tierra hostil  
a la palabra mujer.

Soy mujer,  
en un tiempo  
en que el femicidio  
nos ha vuelto desechables.

Por supuesto,  
dicen que estoy loca,  
extremadamente loca.  
Que soy rara, que me he vuelto extraña.  
Que no tengo lugar en el mundo.

Entonces no me queda de otra:

Tengo que darle nombre al racismo,  
que señalar el desprecio,  
que elegir sobre mi vida,  
que armarme antipatriarcal,  
que inventar la fe para dársela a mi hija,  
que rebelarme contra el patrón,  
que escribir por la libertad a las presas políticas,  
que denunciar al imperio,  
que amar a mi cuerpo,  
que apagar el televisor,

que mostrar mis bolsillos,  
que actuar contra la misoginia,  
que buscar justicia para las mías,  
que demandar castigo a los asesinos.

Es por todo ello,  
que no tengo mas remedio  
que darles la mala noticia  
a las buenas y tranquilas conciencias:

Estoy aquí.  
Exigiendo a gritos,  
la parte que me corresponde del mundo.  
Y no voy a callarme la boca, ni a desaparecer.

*Comerciado: En algunas localidades de México, lo comercializado es un negocio concretado, por ejemplo, "No te puedo prestar este caballo, porque ya está comercializado y mañana se lo llevan."*

## Del otro lado

*Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa*

She looks at the Border Park fence  
posts are stuck into her throat, her navel,  
barbwire is shoved up her cunt.  
Her body torn in two, half a woman on the other side  
half a woman on this side, the right side  
And she went to the North American university,  
excelled in the Gringo's tongue  
learned to file in folders.  
But she remembered the other half  
strangled in Aztec villages, in Mayan villages, in Incan villages.

She watched her land made hostile  
and she a stranger, an 80,000 year old illegal alien  
Go back to where you came from, she is told.  
She is spanked for speaking her natal tongue  
She is laughed at for eating her mother's tortillas and chiles  
She is ridiculed for wearing her bright shawls.  
The ancient dances beaten back inside her,  
the old song choked back into her throat

At night when no one is looking  
she sings the song of the wounded  
the wind carries her wails into the cities and the deserts.

The half of her that's on the other side  
walks lost through the land  
dropping bits of herself, a hand,  
a shoulder, a chunk of hair.  
Her pieces scattered over the deserts,  
the mountains and valleys.  
Her mute voice whispers through grass stems.  
She sings the song of the wounded,  
she howls her pain to the moon  
no time to grieve, no time to heal  
Hers is a struggle of the flesh, a struggle of borders.  
An inner war.



She remembers  
 the horror in her sister's voice,  
 "Eres una de las otras,"  
 The look in her mother's face as she says,  
 "I am so ashamed, I will never  
 be able to raise my head in this pueblo."  
 The mother's words are barbs digging into her flesh.  
 De *las otras*. Cast out. Untouchable.  
 "But I'm me," she cries, "I've always been me."  
 "Don't bring your queer friends into my house,  
 my land, the planet. Get away.  
 Don't contaminate us. Get away."

Away, she went away  
 But every place she went  
 they pushed her to the other side  
 and that other side pushed her to the other side  
 of the other side of the other side  
 Kept in the shadows of other.  
 No right to sing, to rage, to explode.  
 You should be ashamed of yourself.  
 People are starving in Ethiopia,  
 dying in Guatemala and Nicaragua  
 while you talk about gay rights and orgasms.  
 Pushed to the edge of the world  
 there she made her home on the edge  
 of towns, of neighborhoods, blocks, houses,  
 Always pushed toward the other side.  
 In all lands alien, nowhere citizen.  
 Away, she went away  
 but each place she went  
 pushed her to the other side, al otro lado.

Originally published in Juanita Ramos, ed. *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)*. New York: Latina Lesbian History Project, 1987.

## CamaLEÓN

*Yarimee Gutiérrez*

I want to unroll Alzaldúa's  
"excuse me" tongue  
away from tiptoes and eggshells.  
I want to rip it from my body  
to release all you see  
and what's not seen  
allowing my pen to outline  
the best of me  
and bleed litanies for what  
I wish not to be.

I deliver truth.  
Bringer of good news  
I speak in tongues  
pregonera of change  
for things to come  
example of a new generation  
that will not be undone.

I know you feel the change  
the pressure of your melting pot  
boiling over in our fury  
spilling our identities over the edges  
melting those borders you  
keep trying to construct  
as fast as you build them,  
as fast as the speed of brown voices  
carried in the wind  
screaming all we are beyond  
that box you've confined us in.

Welcome to the multi, culti, transnational mess!  
 home to people of colors  
 breaking through the rigid lines  
 of conformity  
 bending genders  
 meshing languages  
 embracing fluidity by accepting  
*all* of their identities  
 home to people like me.

¿Yo? Soy mujer.  
 Woman born of a body that bleeds  
 in tandem with lunar cycles,  
 a physical manifestation of  
 the pain of being *she*.  
 Being she in a world where I am  
 supposed to be fucking  
 flattered by cries of  
 “Damn mami, ¿¡to’ eso es tuyo!?”  
 Is that shake for me?”

And as I breeze through, and walk by,  
 you gotta love those classy ass guys  
 that scream back:  
 “Fuck you! You ain’t that fly!”  
 Ha! You’re just mad that my woman’s got this.  
 But it’s okay papito,  
 You’ll survive.

Me? I’m an intellectual.  
 Hell, I’m intertextual.  
 Don’t be surprised.  
 Yes, this hood chick can read  
 I cross my “T’s” and dot my “I’s”

Esta inmigrante speaks with  
Webster's fluency en dos idiomas,  
three or four if I tried.  
I revel in the beauty of the  
classical cannon  
but choose to blast past that into  
the mastery of realismo mágico  
the perfection of slam poetry  
and the beauty of emotions born  
of words crafted through  
every medium you can perform.

Soy Latina  
criada on the borderlands  
entre aquí y allá,  
seamlessly moving between  
culturas and idiomas en mi andar  
using Spanglish as the structure  
that gives forma to mi pensar.

English has become my language  
of everyday life.  
But Spanish?  
Spanish was born my language to love.

En Español pinto los colores del  
cariño que siento por amigos  
por familia.

En Español tiemblo lo que siento  
por esa mujer que deja a ésta poeta  
sin palabra alguna para hablar.

I'm a femme  
swaying saucy down the street  
privy to those homophobic thoughts  
you leak simply because you're  
blinded by that close minded gaze  
thinking a woman's woman can't  
be *that way*.

I'm that body breaking the mold  
of false assumptions  
challenging smug presumptions  
desiring openly  
crafted in Her image lovingly  
living the way *She* made me

Yo soy el agua fluida  
un camaleón  
a mosaic of colors  
different textures  
different strokes

Y no te lo digo pa' que me entiendas  
sino pa' que te muevas,  
porque aquí, ¡llegue YO!



## Masks

*Nicole Esquibel*

Whose face do I have to buy  
To pass through this threshold  
To conceal myself from the scorn  
The smirks  
The venom of difference  
The contamination for who I am

What products do I have to buy  
To make me the woman  
I think you want me to be  
Entrapment  
Dependent  
On the pedestal of looking good  
How can I stand tall  
And not be noticed at all

Who are those people  
Who define what I should be  
Why do I buy into it  
How deep is the need to fit in

Skin deep  
*Pray the lord my soul to keep*  
On sale  
For the price of a pound of flesh

Somewhere along the way  
I was told  
This is what a woman should be  
*Do you really want to hurt me*  
*Do you really want to make me cry*

Countless hours spent in constant fear  
So I could get through the day  
So I could sleep through the night  
So I could get up and do it  
All over again

Countless other women/men/boys/girls/mija/mijo/children  
Building their masks  
Destroying our community  
Selling each other out

Defy your age by becoming eternal

Drop that lipstick  
Kick in that set  
Laugh at the insanity  
Cry at the waste  
Shout at the devil  
Satan in a smock  
Selling us shit  
Caused to conform  
To spin in circles  
And chase our tails  
Seeking an ideal that does not exist  
Throw off that mask  
Look in the mirror  
And I'll do the same

Tell me

Do you like what you see

## Butch with a Capital "B"

*Randi M. Romo*

She fastens  
the top button  
of her dress shirt  
then wraps  
designer silk  
around her collar  
where it is  
pulled up  
snug into a  
Windsor knot

Over her boxers  
she slides on  
a pair  
of trousers  
that sport  
razor sharp  
creases  
with one inch  
cuffs  
that hit  
her shoe tops  
just so

Like a gunslinger  
she wraps  
her dark  
leather belt  
around  
her waist,  
buckle gleaming  
bright

She checks  
her shoes  
to gauge  
their shine  
then buffs

an errant toe  
on the back  
of her calf

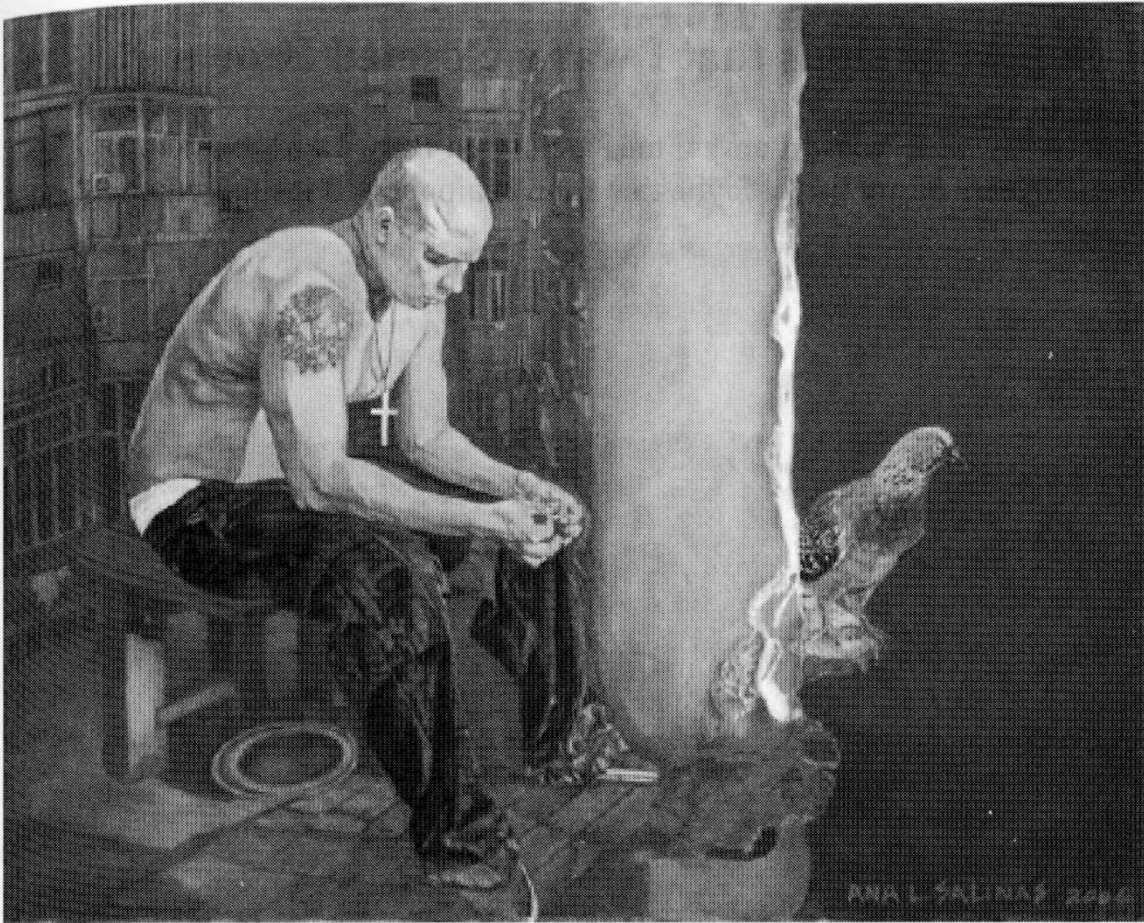
She stands  
looking in  
the mirror  
legs astride  
carefully combing  
her hair  
checking its trim

Shrugging into  
her suit coat  
she shoots  
her cuffs  
making sure  
her cufflinks  
are showing

She straightens  
her tie  
one last time  
then opens  
the door  
stepping outside  
into the  
blast furnace  
of a world  
that tries to  
melt down her  
butchness  
herself that is  
its own  
queer politic,  
the in your face  
I will not hide  
this is who I am

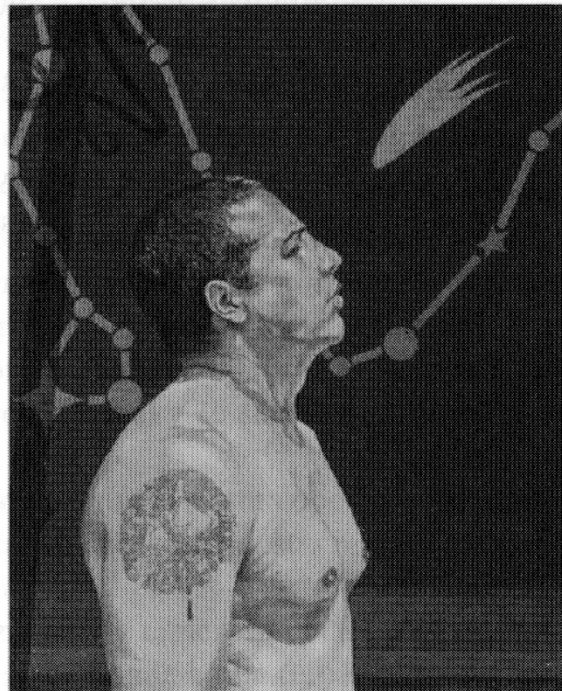
All the while  
underneath her  
Clark Kent exterior  
the bright red  
"S" of a superhero  
rests over the  
strongly beating  
Amazon heart  
of this handsome  
beautiful dyke  
butch daddy  
who walks alone

© 1999, Randi M. Romo



*A Break in the Wall by Ana Lilia Salinas*

These photographs are part of the Transformation Series. "In this series, I have adapted several pre-Columbian symbols in honor of my Mexican indigenous raíces. (roots) The skull and the pre-dominant bleeding color red represents the death of my ignorance and the rebirth of a more conscious view of my position in this globalized society. The image of the male figure, bare chested and tattooed and the symbol of the snake (coatl) are connected with the masculine energy that all women carry to one degree or another. The serpent goddess, Coatlicue, a powerful female deity possessed both female (fertility) and male (serpent) aspects, making her complete. This work is paralleled with my transformation of ideology and maturity as a woman." Ana Lilia Salinas.



*Deseo by Ana Lilia Salinas*

## Signos or signs that I was a closeted Brown girl...

Note: I say was, 'cause I am no mas a closeted Brown girl, but I was for the first 28 years of my life. Maybe this funny snippet will inspire others to take less time.

*Patricia Contreras Flores*

1. About two minutes after I realized that I could not escape the truth, that I was indeed a lesbica, I thought of my mom. I said, "Chingao ¿qué va decir mi mami?"
2. I would constantly stare at girls during catechism classes and really believed I would go to hell for doing it.
3. I wanted to beat up every boy that ever touched my childhood sweetheart - I wanted to touch her.
4. When I began to masturbate I thought of girls and felt horrible because both things would send me to hell.
5. Felt GUILTY, GUILTY, GUILTY all the time for loving girls and then women.
6. After I told my family (some were accepting but not all) I felt bad for letting them down.
7. Every time I looked at a girl, I did the sign of the cross and prayed to not go to hell.
8. I slept with all these boys to prove I wasn't a lesbica, although I fantasized about girls during the act. That made me feel guilty.
9. After I told my mom, she kept trying to stick me back in the closet and I thought maybe it was just "a phase."



## La sal de la vida

*mariana pessah*



*Atrapador de sueños por mariana pessah*

La gran enseñanza me la dio mi viejo. De niña vivía en una casa en la que tanto mi madre como mi padre trabajaban todo el día. Ellos, como tantas otras personas, hacían malabares *buscando ese mango que nos hiciera morfar*,\* pero yo notaba que al volver a casa se producía una diferencia sustancial.

Él, se sacaba los zapatos con las preocupaciones del día, y se ponía las pantuflas del confort. Junto con un vaso de whisky se sentaba en su sillón a leer, a veces, el diario, otras, un libro.

Ella, a quien también le gustaba leer, no tenía la misma opción, ni siquiera sillón propio. Debía continuar y comenzar su *otro* trabajo, su *segunda jornada* – la sin salario – la de la casa, las hijas, la cena.

Mientras comíamos, el rey con voz ronca y temerosa decía: *a la comida le falta sal*. Mi mamá, que no se asemejaba en nada a una reina, creía que era su deber atender a las necesidades masculinas. Con el cansancio a cuestas y su espalda encorvada, se levantaba y la buscaba. Otras veces nos pedía a mi hermana o a mí que lo hiciéramos. A pesar de la pena que me daba ver su extenuación, nunca obedecí a ese pedido. Entendía que si la comida estaba

poco salada, él también tenía condiciones físicas de pararse y buscar los condimentos necesarios. Un grito fuerte de su alteza hacía vibrar los vidrios, parecía un feroz rayo pero no conseguía partir el falso castillo.

El fuerte alarido ordenaba que me fuera a dormir, sin terminar de comer. Mi madre, aunque mordiera sus labios con rabia, nunca contradecía las leyes monárquicas-patriarcales.

Han pasado más de tres largas décadas y esos episodios aún dan vueltas en mi cabeza. Me pregunto qué es la rebeldía sino las ganas de detener ese mundo, la necesidad de cambiar su dirección, gritar injusticias. Deseos de construir nuevas realidades y poder habitarlas.

Rápidamente comprendí que la vida no era igual para *unas* que para *otros*. Mi casa no se parecía a los cuentos infantiles que fantásticamente me daban para leer. En ellos, la mujer del rey era la reina.

Gracias a mi curiosidad empecé a observar lo que sucedía a mi alrededor. Siempre lo mismo. Sólo cambiaban los actores, las actrices. En todas las casas mandaban los hombres y las mujeres debían obedecer. Parecía una monótona telenovela sin mucha imaginación.

Tenía un dolor tan fuerte dentro mío, que necesitaba expresarme. Deseaba gritarle al mundo que no quería vivir así, ni ser cómplice de ese juego macabro. Un día supe que mi rebeldía tenía nombre, se llamaba feminismo. Me iría enterando también que había todo un movimiento social y político, inclusive, que existía mucha bibliografía al respecto y otras mujeres habían sentido ese mismo dolor. Yo no estaba sola.

Al continuar con mis interrogantes, me preguntaba si el amor debería venir únicamente de la “mano” de un hombre, del príncipe azul, ese que después del *casa-miento* se calzaría las pantuflas y bebería whisky confortablemente mientras yo debería continuar la segunda jornada.

Un NO rotundo se imponía frente a esa cárcel social. A la *mentira* de la *casa*.

Un día me descubrí encantada mirando a unas chicas. Las que a mí me gustaban no eran las rubias y flaquitas, sino las que tenían firmeza, decisión en sus actitudes, ideas propias. ¿Sería posible con una conciencia tan despierta enamorarme de un hombre, de un representante de la opresión?

En esa época, como consecuencia de mis búsquedas, mis amigas eran mujeres y cuando estaba entre lesbianas me sentía mucho más cómoda, a veces era como hablar una misma lengua. Había cosas implícitas que dentro de la sociedad heterosexual no encontraba. Pero mi lesbianidad no era un hecho puramente sexual, tampoco la consideraba una orientación a nada.

Con el tiempo descubrí que el hecho de ser lesbiana no era sinónimo de trasgresión, tampoco una siamesa de la rebeldía. Habíamos muchas con diversidad de inquietudes, gustos, his-herstorias y sueños. Otro largo camino a recorrer se presentaba. Lo que tenía nuestra existencia lesbiana era la tierra fértil para plantar y trabajar las ideas feministas, pensar en otros mundos

donde las relaciones de poder no nacieran de forma arbitraria, con la balanza inclinada siempre para el mismo lado.

Un día llegó a mis manos una convocatoria a una reunión de lesbianas feministas. Mis ojos se iluminaron, era lo que sin saber estaba necesitando. Empezaba a sentir que por fin estaba entre pares. En esas reuniones fui descubriendo todo ese patriarcado impuesto que de niñas nos enseñaban como “bueno”, esa misoginia que los hombres desarrollaron con tanta meticulosidad para que nosotras fuéramos fieles sumisas a los patrones. Por más que yo me rebelara a muchas imposiciones, no tenía conciencia de la maquinaria feroz que envolvía esta ideología de dominación.

Recuerdo esas noches de descubrimientos. Nos reuníamos en casa de alguna de nosotras y leíamos textos que nos llevaban a la pasión. Discutíamos acaloradamente, siempre alguna del grupo contaba sus experiencias. Así fui comprendiendo que la lesbofobia también estaba adentro nuestro y había que conocerla y aceptarla para extirparla de nuestros cuerpos.

De ahí fueron saliendo deseos-acciones encaminados a destruir ese mundo heredado al cual no queremos pertenecer. Juntas empezamos a imaginar que somos las arquitectas, ingenieras, artistas y creadoras de los sueños que sí deseamos habitar. Fuimos abriendo camino a nuestras rebeldías y deseos más profundos.

Así comenzaba mi lucha. Era la única forma de transformar mi rabia en acción. Así fue como pude pasar de la soledad de lo personal a lo colectivo de lo político. ¡Y yo no era la única que tenía estas inquietudes!

*\*Aquí parafraseo al tango “Yira, Yira”. Mango es billete, dinero. Morfar es comer. Son palabras en lunfardo, lenguaje típico del tango*

## I

*Alina Galliano*

Dentro de mí se destruyeron inmensas ciudades en mi furia de conquista,  
ahora habito un espacio donde continuamente me modifíco,  
pienso en lo que hasta aquí me ha traído y ya no es mi historia,  
la mujer o la energía en que estoy moviéndome  
ha vivido entre otros labios sorbiendo multitud de humedades al espacio,  
sintiendo entre mis huesos su látigo de miel cambiando paradigmas  
apartando de mis ojos todo lo que pudiese arrebatarme la visión,  
ellas, las que se han alimentado de mi cuerpo, me devolvieron mi salvajismo,  
desenterraron mi nota discordante  
esa que no me permite utilizar el cansancio  
en su forma mas sutil, cansancio, que te envuelve y te dice que eres feliz,  
que estás acompañada, que tienes cómplice para enmudecer o acatar  
que todo anda bien porque es igual al día de ayer y al año anterior  
y que tú, como los demás, vas de la mano de alguien, pero no de la tuya,  
que tú como los demás describes el horizonte según lo que ves,  
pero nunca según lo que en verdad sabes del horizonte,  
que tú como los demás vives fuera de la peligrosa energía del amor  
porque si la miras, si decides unirse al torrente que es su poderío  
ningún segundo sería igual al otro, ni habría expectativas y te hundirías  
en la zonas donde la tierra todavía canta y nubes o silencios son leyendas  
como son leyendas los pájaros  
o las arenas que alguna vez fueron llamadas mares.

Poesía inédita incluida en el poemario *Los días que ahora tengo* por Alina Galliano.

## Black Tie Blues

*Miriam Zoila Pérez*

I don't really like getting dressed up. Actually, I pretty much despise it. I've been like this as long as I can remember, finding the appropriate outfit for holidays and family gatherings was always a traumatic affair. I hated shopping for nice clothes, never felt like my body fit properly into the skirts and tops that my mother thought were appropriate, and the public nature of these events made the way I looked feel like a judgment of how well I was doing.

Now that I'm an adult, and am significantly more confident about my life beyond what can be assessed by looking at me, you'd think that I would be over this anxiety. But when my mom called recently and told me my cousin was getting married, and that the wedding was going to be black tie, the familiar nervousness began, more than six months before the big day. What in the world would I wear to a black tie wedding? The last time I went to a similar affair, I was eight and wore a green velvet dress with a bow and patent leather ballet flats. Unfortunately, that dress is long gone, along with most other skirts or dresses I may have owned throughout my life. Over the last few years I have gradually and happily given up most of the parts of my wardrobe attained during those holiday season shopping expeditions. But even the purging of the more "feminine" parts of my wardrobe has not solved my anxieties about what to wear. It's harder to feel dressy in slacks and a button-down shirt, particularly when the women in my office keep their outfits varied with jewelry, skirts, and high-heeled shoes. Not to mention the summer, which seems way too hot for my usual long sleeves, long pants attire, and makes me wish it was acceptable to wear shorts and a t-shirt to work.

This issue isn't simply about my own level of comfort. When my girlfriend and I decided recently to have a "fancy date" and go see a ballet in NYC, I had to deal with a whole other level to my dress-up anxiety: people's reactions to me. While getting ready, I had my typical what to wear dilemma, putting on various tops and pants until I finally settled on my old standby, black slacks, and a button-down shirt with black shoes. I didn't feel particularly fancy, but I felt comfortable, and this time we were writing our own rules since cultural events in NYC are becoming increasingly casual. My girlfriend, who seemed to enjoy the act of dressing up much more than I did, looked beautiful in a black dress and high heels, and I was excited by the formality and seriousness of our play-date of sorts. We took the subway from my Brooklyn neighborhood to the theatre uptown, and even just walking the few blocks to our stop I noticed how much more attention we garnered that night. Usually, walking around my yuppie, progressive and sort of gay neighborhood, no one gives us a second thought. The stares we sometimes attract in other parts of the city



are pretty much non-existent there, so I was surprised to notice that on that particular evening, we seemed to be some sort of a spectacle, attracting longer than normal stares and glances.

On the subway, we went about our business, sitting on the crowded train alongside everyone else. The details of the evening are hazy in mind now: Were we holding hands? Talking quietly to each other? Kissing? But I unfortunately can't forget the last few minutes of the train ride. I had noticed that there was a man across the train, very obviously staring in our direction, talking to the man next to him. At first I was relieved that he was speaking in a foreign language I didn't understand, because the look on his face was enough to tell me I wouldn't like what he was saying. Then, for some reason, he decided to switch back to English, and his commentary got much louder. He wasn't talking to me, but he was talking about me, loud enough for the entire train to hear. I tried to block out his comments, but the snippets I did catch were enough to leave me shaken for a few days afterwards. More than what he said, which was something to the affect of, "Look at her, she thinks she's a man but she's not a man," was the way he said it, the tone of his voice and the look on his face. Both were laden with obvious disgust, hatred, and what I interpreted as a tinge of violence. I was embarrassed, I was scared and I felt threatened. We exited the train after having to sit through a few minutes of this, and were forced to walk right by this guy to get off, as he continued his harassment and commentary. As we stepped off the train, my girlfriend pulled me to her and said, "Kiss me," her immediate reaction to this violation she couldn't do anything about.

People get harassed on the subway all the time. They get harassed on the street, in public places, in schools, and in workplaces. People who don't follow society's rules about gender presentation are particularly at risk, including trans folk and gender queer people. This was my first experience with this kind of harassment, but unfortunately it probably won't be my last. Heterosexual and feminine-presenting women get constantly sexually harassed. A recent survey by New York City officials found that 68% of respondents report being sexually harassed on the subway. And I used to deal with that a lot more when I had long hair and dressed more femininely. I was relieved when men stopped directing their attention to me, but now I feel a different kind of affront. This guy who harassed me on the subway wasn't making me into a sex object, he was treating me like a threat. The disgust in his voice made it clear how he felt, and I left with the feeling that I wasn't safe, and that if someone found me that repulsive and offensive, how did I know they wouldn't stop at physically harming me?

I'm pretty sure that I won't face this kind of harassment at my cousin's wedding, but whatever I decide to wear, my childhood anxiety still follows me. I envy my brother, who simply has to rent the same penguin-suit tuxedo that every other man at the wedding will be wearing. What I choose to wear



is taken very personally, by my family, my friends, and even random people on the street. It's read as a commentary about how I see myself, what I think about the unwritten social rules of dress, and gender identity. Ideally, we could all just wear what ever suited our fancy, men in ball gowns, women in tuxedos, little boys in tutus. We haven't reached that point yet, and until we do, I'll be uncomfortably perched somewhere on the line between pants and a skirt, trying to figure out what to wear to this black tie wedding.

## Siempre chillando

*Edith Bucio*

In my house it wasn't the boogie man, or a nameless *monstruo* hiding in our closet that scared me. But rather it was *La Llorona*. A sad, crying woman who haunted my waking thoughts. She sauntered through the unpaved roads of Sinaloa, Jalisco, and Michoacán. Not following the treaties of war, she crept out of the alleys and abandoned buildings in California, Texas, and Arizona. She defied borders, transcending into old Mexico and new, following her people, her children, believers and non believers. That is how she managed to find me, in Chicago's northwest side.

La Llorona was always with us, even at Mamma's work. The bus that would drop us off at the M-track or the one-hour train ride taking us to the suburbs wouldn't keep her away. She was always there, at the tip of Mamma's tongue, and on the back of mine.

Mamma liked walking from the station to the three-floor cream colored house she cleaned. The sidewalks were wide and neat. But what she liked best was what wasn't there. There were no bleeding hearts embedded in the middle of the sidewalk claiming *Niko'n Cindy 4 ever*. There were no broken windows in cars, no smells of grease lingering out of *taquerías*, or spiraling umbrellas hovering over *elote\** stands. There was no sign of our streets here. The only glimpse we got of the neighborhood within that beige utopia was in the other brown faces that cleaned and mopped just like we did.

The streets were scattered with storefronts that had thick wooden doors with bells that rang each time they were swung open. We always looked from the outside in. We'd pass by some shops as we made our way through the downtown area. My favorite was the costume store. It had bumble-bee suits and angel wings all year long. It made me want to be a June princess as soon as I stepped out of the train.

I made the mistake of pulling at my mother's skirt once. I pointed at a pink dress and crown. "What?" she asked. I couldn't respond. The words were stuck in my throat in one big knot. The glass window was mocking me with my own finger. She looked at the costume and said with an un-amused laugh, "You're kidding, right? We're months away from Halloween, and you're too fat for that anyway." She walked away. I stayed behind, staring at the dress on the small mannequin that hideously clashed with the reflection of my belly bulging out of my sister's old red blouse.

The mother of the house had a perfect plastic smile that matched the pearls around her thin long neck. She would ask me about school and friends. I'd always look at Mamma before answering; English in front of her always came out shaky and thick. It wasn't smooth like my sister's when she talked to

boys.

“You see these people, how they live? Nice, isn’t it? They were born into this. Me, I was born to a home with no floor. And you, you have more than I did. But if you want this,” she said waving her swollen brown hands about the tall ceilings and hardwood floors, “there is no way any of this can come from me. It’s either a man, or a career. It’s your choice, niña,” Mamma said once, after the mother left for her manicure appointment.

There were days we’d miss our train and have to spend the night. We’d stay in the guest room. I’d dream a woman crying, hovering over me, and I’d lay anxiously on that mattress that felt like clay, waiting for my kiss.

In that beige world, good women were white, and thin. They had clothes that never wrinkled. Their nail polish didn’t chip. Books could be read while we mopped their floors. Dancing could be done as we hushed their children’s nightmares away. From the outside in they were as shiny as that pink princess dress, something I could never be. From the inside out, we got to see them with huge blue curlers in their hair, no make-up, and hung over. When the mother was “sick” I was the one sent to the bathroom, to kneel on the tile floor with a plate of crackers and a glass of water. She was passed out once, head resting on the toilet seat. I grabbed an ice cube from the glass and rubbed it over her pink lips. “Help me,” she whispered, reaching out with her soft, manicured hand.

At home, a good woman was one that took care of her family. For Mamma, that meant sending my sister, Kika, to Mexico when she found a pack of condoms in her book bag, and having me go with her to work after school and on weekends. She worked hard for her children. She gave us what was necessary in life: clothes she bought at the 5-and-10 shop, groceries that came in bulk from Aldi, alcohol rub-downs when we were sick. Mass every Sunday was a must. School wasn’t missed. The absent father was never mentioned.

At school a good woman was one that swayed her ass side to side just so. With rhythm in her hips. Never kept quiet. Talked back to boys. Wore burgundy on her lips, and colored her hard curls blonde. She acted older than she was. She never gave herself a chance to just be.

I tried to be good. But I didn’t know what good was. Mamma taught me to work and work. The mother we cleaned after was magical, turning from a princess into a pumpkin over and over again. The girls at school showed how to give hickeys and hide them. The sad woman in my dreams just cried and cried.

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“Stop shaking! You’re gonna fuck it up,” Rosie screams. I’m trying the best I can to keep my hand steady. The make-up on her eye lids is thick and black. I burn the tip of the liner, purse my lips together blowing air on

the melted lump for a couple of seconds before handing it to her. “Alright, my turn,” Rosie and I are best friends. We met in the sixth grade but we hated each other then. “Because you were a stuck up bitch that’s why,” she often said.

But, then, the summer after my eighth grade graduation Mamma sat me down at our kitchen table and told me, “*La señora Helen es una lesbiana.*” “*Lesbiana,*” the word lingered heavy and thick in the back of my throat. “*Lesbiana,*” I repeated not knowing what the word meant. “I need this job. But you, there’s no reason why you have to see those things. You’re not taking the train with me to work no more. You’re coming straight home from school, you hear?”

That’s the summer Rosie told me her brother liked me. And just like that I had a boyfriend and a best friend.

My first kiss, my first high, my first laugh it seemed, was at the side of Rosie. We shared a bed on most nights. But when not, we fell asleep to each other’s voice while our phones hung loosely on our necks.

“I got something to tell you. But you gotta promise me you ain’t gonna tell no one.” “Yeah, I promise,” I say. “You remember that guy Xavier?” “You mean that old man who used to follow you to school?” “He ain’t that old,” her voice sounds far away.

“He’s not stalking you again is he?” “Nah, just that I’ve been thinking. If we’re friends, we need to be honest, you know? And well...” “What? Come on tell me!” “I ain’t a virgin no more,” she whispers. I don’t say anything. “Now it’s your turn...to tell me something.” “Like what? You know everything about me!” “Come on, there’s got to be something.” For some reason the only thing I can think of is that crying woman my mother would threaten me with when I was a kid. “There’s nothing Rosie,” I say letting go of the receiver.

My love. My soul. My life. These were the words that were whispered to her. *Mi amor. Mi alma. Mi vida.* She claimed they would be whispered to me eventually. But I always pulled away. When pinned against a tree, mustache scratching my upper lip, his tongue prying into my mouth, the smell of beer making me gag. I bite him. Hard. I spit out the taste of blood and run. She stops fixing me up with guys after that.

“Alo?”

“It’s me”

“Oh, hey”

It’s a never ending song with us. “I kissed a girl,” I whisper. We stay on the phone for a long time, not talking, or listening, just breathing. The thick silence makes me think of that one morning we waited for her name to be called in the waiting room of the abortion clinic. I want to tell her there are only two people who I need to accept this part of me, my mother and her. But I say nothing, and she says nothing.

We cannot dance together, don’t ever nook our elbows around each other’s

arms. Our hugs are awkward and quick. But we can stop talking for months at a time and pick up half a year later and start right from where we left off. We finish each other's sentences. We argue and she never lets me win. We are mutual memory. What she forgets I remember. What I deny she confronts.

She calls me back a week later, and says, "I wish it were a guy. But it's not. So...whatever."

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"That white girl and the one you went to school with, don't like them. They better not be coming here when I'm at work," my mother says, keeping her eyes on her seven o'clock *novela*. When Rosie calls, my mother hangs up on her. If Kristen is over, she tells her to go home.

Rosie does my make-up before school. We meet on the corner of Western and Peterson. We never make it to school on time. In the bathroom at Wolfy's, she digs through her bag, bringing out eye liner, foundation, lipstick.

After school, Kristen waits for me on the corner of Milwaukee and Western. At home, she rubs the burgundy and black off my eyes and lips with a wet towel. We put on my mother's records as loud as they'll go. At 8:30 she goes into my room and doesn't come out until the next morning when I open the window for her to get out.

My mom's records have songs that sound like men and women crying.

"What are they saying?" Kristen asks. "I love you so much Llorona, that I have given you my life." What more do you want? You want more." "She's greedy" "No. He just doesn't know how to love her. She never asked for his life. I would never love anyone to death. I would love enough to live."

"What happens to them?" "He leaves her and their children. She drowns them in a river, and then kills herself." "No wonder the singer sounds so sad."

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*Llorona. Malinche. Marina.* She is our first mother. *Marina*, Lover of the Conqueror of Mexico. Either taken by force or gone willingly, in her new tongue she becomes nothing less than a *vendida*. Traitor to her people. Heroine to the Spanish. In our dreams she cries and cries. As Indian she was *Marina*. As a white man's woman, *Malinche*. In death she is La Llorona.

God tricks her into believing she can be saved. If her children forgive her, her soul can rest. But we are too scared to become like her, so we reject her. Everyday she cries, and everyday we push her farther and farther away, from the day we are born to the day we die.

## La fobia que hay en mi

*Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso*

Este texto fue leído en la Jornada por el Día Mundial contra la Homofobia organizado por el Instituto Hanna Arendt el 17 de mayo 2006 en Buenos Aires.

En medio de la coordinación de una jornada para sistematizar una actividad de intercambio entre varias organizaciones de Argentina y Brasil, tuve la oportunidad, durante el almuerzo, de compartir una charla amistosa con las y los participantes. Después de todo el parloteo colectivo sobre los detalles del viaje, la situación de ambos países, el estado de las organizaciones comunitarias, Lula, Kirschner, entre otros temas, el grupo se fue dispersando y en un momento determinado quedamos solamente la coordinadora del proyecto y yo. Suele pasar que una situación así sea vista como una oportunidad para alguien que, como yo, inmigrante afro-descendiente, activista lesbiana feminista, está intentando abrirse espacio laboral sin mucho éxito hasta el momento. Sin embargo, yo comencé a sentirme intranquila.

- ¿Y, hace mucho que vives aquí? – ¿Y, por qué viniste?

Insistente me preguntaba la coordinadora mientras en mi interior una situación de emergencia se desataba. No sé si esto les recuerda a alguna situación familiar: se trata de un malestar interno, un proceso de puesta en alerta de todos los sentidos ante una situación que puede resultar amenazante.

- Me dijeron que tienes una hija. - ¿Y, cómo se llama?

La mujer avanzaba placidamente en la conversación hacia ese campo peligroso en donde una se descubre haciendo lo que llamaría una operación habitual: la pregunta de ¿sigo o me escabullo?

Yo no conocía a esta persona, no sabía prácticamente nada de ella, no había un comentario previo, ni había nada en sus ojos, en su mirada, en su postura, que me hiciera particularmente sentir incómoda o amenazada, pero internamente, al quedarme sola con ella yo comencé a no sentirme a gusto. No era algo grave, era a penas una sensación leve, una especie de posición de alerta que podría pasar desapercibida, pero que hoy quiero enfocar porque creo que hay algo allí, por repetitiva, de la actuación del poder; un poder que no solo actúa afuera, sino y muchos más, adentro. Poder de auto gobernación, de auto represión que es la reversa interna de las actitudes externas y conocidas que hemos dado en llamar lesbo/homo/trans fobia.

¿Qué es lo que me pasa? ¿Por qué me siento incómoda de hacer lo que en otro lugar puedo hacer como si nada? Son preguntas que vengo haciéndome hace tiempo, pero que no siempre he estado dispuesta a contestar. Esa desnaturalización, ese darme cuenta, sobre cómo reaccionaba ante la



posibilidad de contar mi vida – mi vida de lesbiana – ante alguien desconocido, no proveniente de mi mundo activista, lo inicié apenas hace unos años.

Quiero que entiendan, la cuestión es que yo soy una activista lesbiana feminista pública desde hace aproximadamente 15 años y la gente da por sentado, hasta yo misma doy por sentado, que el tema de la visibilidad es algo ya superado para alguien como yo. Es algo que ni siquiera es tema de conversación entre nosotras las “viejas activistas”, un tema que parecería que atañe únicamente a las nuevas, a las que inician su tránsito en el lesbianismo, o que inician su *salida del closet*. Se da por sentado que un día una se levanta con la decisión de salir y sale, y ahí se terminó la historia. Pero lo que yo quiero confesar es que, al menos en mi caso, esto no es así. Si yo me detengo a observar las historias cotidianas de cada una de las lesbianas feministas que conozco también puedo llegar a la conclusión de que esto es un mito. Realmente, al menos para las lesbianas de mi condición – latinoamericanas, profesionales o no, pertenecientes a clases subalternas, madres o no – *salir del closet* es un estado permanente. Ahora que me detengo a pensarlo, esto es terrible.

Una se arma todo un mundo de contención, una red afectiva de amigas, algunos amigos, algunos parientes. En el caso de las activistas nos movemos libremente entre los movimientos sociales y salimos a la calle con pancartas y slogans, aparecemos en reportajes. Las más académicas dictamos conferencias y vamos a eventos internacionales con nuestras caras de lesbianas aguerridas y orgullosas. Una se construye todo un mundo de visibilidad, donde parece que todo va bien. Podemos enfrentar a la iglesia, enrostrarle a las instituciones nuestro lesbianismo. Y después te vas a la casa, viene la amiguita de la nena o tu hermana, y te encuentras en la situación, no siempre conciente, de reprimir el beso que le quieres dar a tu pareja-novia-amante. O ante un nuevo trabajo, te encuentras siempre pensando si es conveniente o no decir todo cuando te preguntan por “tu familia”. Con el tiempo una aprende a naturalizar ese estado, se vuelve especialista en la detención de signos que te indiquen cuándo abandonar o cuándo dar pie a una charla sobre la vida personal, aprende a esquivar determinadas preguntas, aprende a convivir con la pregunta de si, ¿lo digo ahora o después?

¿Lo digo ahora o después?, es la pregunta que nunca me deja y a la que siempre tengo que enfrentar aún cuando cada vez más la respuesta sea “ahora”. No sé si logro hacerme entender: me doy cuenta que en realidad nunca se abandona esa sensación de peligro al mostrarse. Pasa el tiempo y cada vez es más extenso el radio de visibilidad pero cuando una menos lo espera, vuelve a encontrarse en una situación en la que se hace la pregunta y en que la pregunta es pertinente. ¿O no lo es? ¿Es solo un viejo resabio interno por superar? Yo creo que no. Yo creo que en nuestras sociedades tan “superadas”, tan “posmodernas”, las lesbianas aprendemos a convivir con el miedo.

Hay un miedo que me parece no es internalizado sino constitutivo de la existencia lesbiana. Los signos de ese miedo son a veces casi imperceptibles

para la misma que lo sufre. La inmensa mayoría de las lesbianas ni se cuestionan sobre su propia cárcel. Ellas, contrario a otras experiencias de lo abyecto, parecen convivir bien en la invisibilidad, en el anonimato, en la omisión. De ahí que esta disputa por un nombre propio ha sido solo tema de la política lésbica feminista. Y quizás ahí, algunas pistas sobre su tibia participación en las fiestas de visibilidad donde solo las menos participan.

Yo sé que en esta mesa sobre homofobia se nos ha instado a hablar sobre el fenómeno de la fobia a las formas de lo abyecto. Más allá de las instancias legales a las que podemos acudir para la búsqueda de soluciones, yo insisto en esta manía revisionista sobre las propias categorías con que contamos para referirnos a nuestros problemas concretos, e insisto en esta manía de complejización de la mirada.

El recorrido que regularmente hago desde la experiencia subjetiva hacia la caracterización más general de los fenómenos, me permite hurgar en aquello que se escapa a una mirada llana del poder. En el caso particular del fenómeno que se ha dado en llamar homofobia me parece que se agrupan bajo el mismo paraguas experiencias muy diferentes, y con ello se ocultan diferencias fundamentales que pueden existir entre los grupos que padecen la problemática de esta forma específica de rechazo social. En ese sentido, quiero expresar aquí mi inconformidad con un término que vuelve a repetir la operación de universalizar lo que en realidad refiere a una experiencia particular de la opresión. Al mismo tiempo, sé de la dificultad de no contar con un concepto base que unifique la problemática y le dé un sentido común para quienes la padecen, y no me conformo con la solución de empezar a enumerar caso por caso: homo-lesbo-trans fobia y lo que se vaya agregando. Así que veo allí una dificultad a la que deberemos enfrentar.

Al mismo tiempo, y es lo que he querido colocar aquí con mi narración, siento que el concepto de fobia como la operación mediante la cual se discrimina, se violenta, se intimida, se rechaza a otro u otra por sus prácticas amoratorias, sexuales, vinculares, y de género, debe ser analizado en toda la complejidad que implica tanto en lo colectivo, la buena vida en común, como a nivel de nuestra propia constitución subjetiva. Porque sin lugar a dudas la aversión social hacia los y las sujetas abyectas debe tener su correlación en nuestras vidas no solo en términos de los límites externos sino de los propios. Y me parece que trabajar por el corrimiento de los límites externos no se puede hacer sin enfrentar los que llevamos dentro.

Trabajar en contra de lo que hasta ahora se ha llamado homofobia, debería ser más que luchar por mecanismos institucionales que repriman, repriman, frenen las acciones de odio contra las personas que desafían los parámetros del género y la sexualidad. El castigo es necesario pero no alcanza para enfrentar la problemática. De lo que se trata es de generar sujetos libres de este odio particular, sujetos que desaprendan este rechazo.

## Skirts

*oneangrygirlfag*

You put the skirt on just like pants -  
one leg at a time.

Only somehow it is not so easy.

How to put on the blouse, skirt, practical shoes,  
the smile that says

“don’t hurt me, I won’t mess with your gender.”

Step on the plane to México

to the family that did not come

that stayed and

stayed and struggled hand-to-mouth

that stayed and stayed in a place where skirts make for survival

where the crazy macha ways of three generations of mujeres this side

could get us all in a LOT of trouble.

Blouse, skirt, practical shoes, a smile that says

“I miss you so much I am willing to put the skirt on -  
one leg at a time.”

## Rara y atrabancada

*Yesiga López*

We sat across from each other at her kitchen table exactly one day after my 27<sup>th</sup> birthday. In my best Spanish I asked her questions about her life, like what she had imagined for me and my three brothers when we were little and how she felt about what had actually happened in each of our lives. Specifically about me: was she happy with the way I turned out? She said, “Yes, very much, I could never have imagined one of my children would attend a University.” I asked her if she thought about me having a family. She said, “Yes, I would like to have another grandchild and it doesn’t look like any of the boys are going to have anymore. But it seems like you are not wanting to right now.” I smiled. We went on a few tangents and eventually I asked her, “You said before you saw me having kids, but what about a husband? Do you see me with a husband?”

She said, “Well, not really, but I also never cared about having a husband myself, I just wanted to have my kids. You don’t have to get married.”

I told her I was very happy that she said that she didn’t see me with a husband. With a smile I said, “Because I am not going to have a husband, do you know why?” She said she didn’t know why and asked me to tell her. I paused and hoped and waited and looked to her to say she knew, and finally asked, “You really don’t know why?” She said, “No.” I said, “Because I don’t like men. I tried, I really did, but there’s – nothing.” My mom asked, “What about women?” I answered, “Yes, I do like women. She said she didn’t understand but that she loved me and that God made everything right. We cried and hugged each other, two things outside of the norm in my family.

I asked her, you really never knew? She said, “How could I have imagined such a thing?” I said, “But don’t you remember how I always complained to wear dresses and never liked to cook or iron or those types of things?” She said, “Yes, but that didn’t mean anything.” I agreed but also said it was on a smaller scale my own rebellion, and then she jogged her memory more and said, “The only thing I can think is that growing up sometimes I thought you were ‘rara y atrabancada.’ ” Rara y atrabancada loosely translates as different and unruly. She said that she would walk me to school when I was little and that I would walk really far in front of her and that she used to think to herself that if someone wanted to come up and kidnap me, she wouldn’t even be able to do anything because I was so far ahead. And that she thought to herself: Why am I even walking her to school? After that, even though I was only five years old, she let me walk to and from school by myself.

Then she told me the Ms. Fregoso story, about when my kindergarten teacher came to the house one day and my mom thought, “But what could my quiet, well behaved daughter have done so that the teacher would come

to my house?" I was in Ms. Fregoso's ESL (English as a Second Language) kindergarten class. She came to tell my mom that she wanted to switch me to the English kindergarten class. She said that I was trying to correct her English. My mom and I laughed together.

"Rara y atrabancada." She didn't mean "rara" as in bad or strange, she meant different, special, and "atrabancada" meaning forward, coming on strong, not neat, not following order, unruly, wild, all these words at once.

We talked more and then she said, "Well, then maybe it's not such a good idea you have kids then."

My ears perked and my heart sank. I said, "Why not? I think I will make an excellent mother with or without a partner. Do you mean because it will be hard for my child?" She said, "No, a child will love his parent that loves and rears him. It's because your children might turn out the same way." I said, "So what if they are? I will love them the same. Let them all be gay," and I smiled big wanting her to imagine loving her gay grandchildren. She said, "Don't say those things, and lower your voice, you're talking loud, the neighbors might hear." I said, "It's ok mom, I'm very comfortable with it and with me. I tell everyone. All my friends know, everyone at work knows, I tell new people I meet and everyone just accepts me for who I am." She said, "You can't be vocal about these things." I said, "I'm not ashamed. This is just part of who I am and I don't have the same rights as other people because of who I am. I feel it's important for me to ensure that my rights are protected too. I want to be vocal about it. I don't mind if the neighbors hear me or find out about me. If it's about how comfortable I feel about it I would fly a big flag around to let all the neighbors know." She laughed uncomfortably. I said, "I'm proud of me, every part of me. I can't change who I love, but, more importantly, I want you to know that if I could, I would not change it. I wouldn't change anything; not that we grew up with very little or not having a father around, nothing. Everything that has happened to me has made me the person I am, a person I like and am proud of."

She became quiet and tried to change the subject. I kept pushing.

We talked more and more and were mostly fine until we got into the religious aspect of it. She kept repeating the words, "Dios hizo todo bien," translating as, "God made everything right." A phrase she had said when I first told her but which I had mistaken for a good sign. I thought she meant, "God doesn't make mistakes, so you are the way you are for a reason." The more she said it I realized she was in fear God would see me negatively. She quoted the Bible to me and said that God made Adam and Eve. I reminded her that I didn't choose to be this way and that there were times in my life where I was ashamed, and felt wrong, and refused to accept myself, but that now I accept myself and am proud of being a lesbian, as proud as I am to be Mexican, as proud as I am to come from a struggling background. We stopped talking about religion and the conversation turned more positive. She said she loved



me and she would not be like parents who say, "I will never talk to you again," or, "Get out of my house!," that she couldn't understand really, but she loved me and nothing would change that. And she said that in most cases it's the children who need their parents, but in our case she felt that she needed me more than I needed her.

We took a break and ran errands.

We talked about everyday things, not forced conversation; we had our usual rapport. I lay on the couch writing in the living room while she cooked. After dinner I thanked her for listening to me and loving me, and letting me tell her more about who I was. I told her I had wanted to tell her for six years and that it was difficult for me to do and that I knew it was also difficult for her to hear, but that I felt so wonderful that she finally knew me better. She said thank you and that she loved me very much. I read through her mail for anything important like I always do, and she packed me a to-go-plate.



*Identity* by Carmen N. Rodríguez



## Because My Mother Taught Me How to Love Women

*Ty González*

The first time I saw my mother kiss a woman, I immediately recognized the discomfort and the swift glance 'round the room *para ver quien le estaba mirando*. I was aware of her awkward response because she was always telling me that it was okay to love women, that "Liking girls means you are a lesbian and there is nothing wrong with that." Why then was she uncomfortable? I thought I knew why. I smirked and told myself, "*Porque con la boca se dice mucho.*" One of the main reasons I could never readily believe my mother is because she always told me how to live correctly while she did exactly the opposite. It was a paradoxical childhood.

We were a Christian family. My grandmother was a Bible worshipping *crisiana* and all of her grandchildren except for my oldest cousin, Tito, went to Catholic school. We knew what sins were almost as soon as we discovered how to love and we knew that loving certain people meant you went to hell. So, when we moved out of my grandmother's house when I was six years old, I missed the colorful sounds of old salsa at 5 o'clock in the morning, the soft bristling of the broom on wooden floors, the smell of fresh *sofrito* chopping in the blender, but I welcomed my mother's newfound freedom to express radical ideas...like lesbianism.

To tell you that I was completely comfortable with my mother's ease is a lie. My Christian ideals...mainly that you slept only with men (after you were married of course!), never had an abortion, and respected your elders, clashed alarmingly with my mother's heathenish views. Screaming at the top of my lungs through the shower curtain became a normal part of growing up.

"Mother, how can you say that?! Babies are innocent! You cannot murder a child that has done nothing wrong!" The shower curtain pulled open a bit and water dripped on the floor. Her "itty bitty chocolate chips," as she lovingly called them, peeked out at me under a tide of foamy suds. She ran the oversized Goody comb through her long black hair, with sparse silverfish strands, words flowing steadily and strong from her mouth, eyes focused on taming her long mane.

"Daughter, don't judge people, especially when you've never walked in their shoes. If you get pregnant while you're still young, you better believe I'm taking you to the clinic. It's what a woman has to do. Do you know how many abortions I've had? Yes, of course, judge me now." Her eyes looked up for a second and the curtain pulled closed, metal hooks making a terrible screeching sound across the plastic rod, my jaw falling wide open.

She was right though, you know. The first time that I was pregnant, I was in college, and I understood what it meant to live in a glass house. I vomited

from the clinic all the way to my dorm room and not from the anesthesia, but because I was choking on years of hypocrisy and I felt like I could not breathe. Perhaps this is why I went through so many relationships with men before acknowledging that I, too, am a lesbian. But, wait, no, that's not right. I cannot speak for my mother. As she has told me clearly, she is a bi-sexual woman who chooses to sleep with men. But how I wish she were a lesbian! The things I would tell her!

Dear Mommy,

You were right about me. I love women. I love the arch of their backs and the softness of their skin. I love the kindness you can find in the corners of their eyes – that same kindness Nana used to have before a disappointing life made her so bitter. I love the way they laugh with such ease, dropping their heads back so simply, mouths open, lungs pushing air out of proud chests, shoulders dropping the weight of decades just for a few seconds...a few seconds of total freedom. I especially love the way you can talk to them until the sun comes up and then go on to make sandwiches and see each other off to work...just like we used to do even when you were really mad at me.... And I especially love how easy it is to love them...you know, the way you love me. I wish you were a lesbian, mommy, so you could know this liberation...so you could finally be happy.

You would be able to tell me what it's like to get your heart broken by a woman...how much it hurts and feels like I'll never get back up again...but that there are plenty of other women in the sea. You could talk me out of the depression that accompanies the discovery that I will never have a genetically linked child with the woman I love so much. That the choice to pick a friend who might try to take our baby away or a stranger who our baby will never know is still not the hardest decision I'll ever have to make.... I'll have to decide if I should lie to the doctors and say that she is my sister so that she can comfort me in the examination room.... I'll have to go to our baby's school and yell at teachers for letting kids make fun of her lesbian mommies. I'll have to tell my father and my grandparents that I'm gay and hope for the best. I'll have to remind myself that I can't hold her hand walking down the street because it's just not safe. I'll have to figure out if it's worth going to Thanksgiving and feeling the pity of straight uncles and cousins...the guilt they have for doing something to make me this way. I'll have to fight the urge to be ashamed of who I am every time I come out. I'll have to fight the even greater shame of remembering the privileges I had when I was with men. And I'll have to figure out how to understand the freedom that comes with loving who I am and the fear that people can so easily take that away from me without my permission. You see, mommy, if you were a lesbian, you could show me how to face the monsters that still live under my bed.

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It is October now and I haven't spoken to my mother since the week after Mother's Day in May. When I came out to her in April, she made such a big deal of it and told me how proud she was of me.

"Oh, daughter, I always knew. From when you were a very little girl, I knew. You hated dresses, you know? I hated putting them on you. I wanted you to find your own identity, but you know the family. And I would try just to please them, but you would fight tooth and nail. 'No!', you used to say and shake your little head. But, then, when you were older and I would ask you if you were a lesbian, you'd say, 'Ugh, that's disgusting, Mom,' I just let it go. I figured you would come to it when you were ready or that maybe I was wrong and you really did like boys. But, God, deep down inside I knew.

"You need to be proud of who you are, Ty. Don't let anyone make you feel ashamed. That's what they did to me. Remember when I told you what Nana did to me? Ah, what shame! I was so embarrassed. It wasn't the spoon, either. I could handle getting hit with a spoon of rice, even if it was in the face. And, I could even handle it happening in front of my girlfriend. But, ah, Ty, the worst part is that your grandmother never looked up at me. She grabbed another *cuchara* and kept turning the rice. She never said a word. She made her point with violence, telling me to leave the disgrace outside of the house, as usual. And I did, you know? That was the last time I brought a woman home. After that, I was creeping around like it truly was a sin and I began to feel that way... disgusted. Never allow anyone to have this power over you, *Taila*. Be proud of who you are... After all, you come from a long line of lesbians." She laughed then. I treasure my mother's laughter. After so many years of being with her and seeing her sad so many of those years, it was always a *tesoro* to hear her laughing. It meant good times were coming. For a while, the good times were few and far in between, like that summer when we had to leave her in that place, doctors words drifting into empty space...bi-polar...episodes...manic...sadness...danger...depression.

"You know what was the last straw for me, Ty? It was when I was dating Karen. She was so beautiful. Even though your grandmother did what she did to me, I didn't care when I met Karen. We even held hands in the neighborhood. I'm sure the whole family must have heard about it. You know those fucking neighbors were always in the business, but we were in love. That's also when I met John. Ah, you didn't know that I met Dev's father when I was with Karen did you? He was always trying to get us into a threesome. I should have known! Anyway, we all used to go dancing to the Garage."

"Wait. But, Titi used to go dancing with you guys."

"Ty, I told you, everyone knew. No one talked about it, just as I don't tell their secrets, but everyone knew Karen. We all hung out together. It's just that there were two worlds, you know? The one where we were all free – mostly at



night in the club – then the other one which was every day for 365 days a year. It was like we were all experts at wearing a mask that we wished we could just throw away, but none of us dared to because it also protected us. But I loved Karen. I never knew I could love anyone that way. After Jerry raped me, my body was not a part of me. I lived inside of it, but it was just a shell. I was so detached from myself. When I met Karen, I became alive all over. I felt safe with her. I felt loved.

“Then she died. And my world came crashing down. It was the second time the darkness came to me. The first time, of course, was when Jerry left me naked on the fire escape and Tío Papo found me the next day. And just like then, I couldn’t talk about what was happening to me. I couldn’t tell anyone that she was dead and that I was destroyed. No one would understand. ‘How could you love a woman?’ I could hear them and I just didn’t want to deal with it, so I went away. I guess I’ve been going away for a long time, daughter.

“The worst part is that no one called me when she died. I found out days later. I went looking for her because she had just disappeared. I went to her house and her mother was finally there. She said they found Karen with her throat cut open. I cried and cried, screaming on the inside, wanting to just die. Titi tried to help me, but I just couldn’t open up. I couldn’t speak for weeks. I think I did die.

“Daughter, you have to protect yourself. You can’t allow anyone to hurt you or Sofia. I will protect you. No one will hurt you guys. You know the family is very homophobic. I will make sure no one says anything to you or makes you feel uncomfortable. You know you can never tell Nana, right?”

At this, I shuddered. I had been debating telling my grandmother for some time and now my mother confirmed my worst fear. My mother was like my sister. I was born when she was only a girl herself and we were best friends for about 15 years of my life. It was my grandmother who raised me. She took care of me, helped as best she could with homework, showed me what work meant in the factory...she loved me. Would this change everything? I also didn’t know the woman my mother described from her childhood. My grandmother was caring and sincere, absolutely forgiving and unconditionally loving. She took care of my uncle when he was sweating out the heroin, even though he stole from her and lied to her. She gave the strongest hugs, laughed with her whole little body, and ran a house of five sons and daughters, countless fatherless grandchildren, and neighborhood kids that no one else wanted. How could she be ruthless? How could she judge me? Disown me? Was it possible?

“You can’t tell her, Ty! She won’t be able to handle it. She’s old and she’s got her prejudices. Her love for you will change.”

“I don’t know what to tell Nana, mom. She will know that something is up though. I emailed the family to tell everyone and so far everyone has replied, except for Tío Papo. I imagine he’s going through it and she can always tell when something is up. They do live together, you know?”

“Ay, you emailed them? Why? Why didn’t you tell them in person? It doesn’t matter. I’ll talk to them. I’ll protect you.”

It’s been about five months since I last spoke to my mother. She won’t return my calls and to my emails, she replies months later. It’s a pattern I know very well. It’s what she did to my aunts, uncles, and even my grandmother when we were growing up. The darkness would come and we were not allowed to pick up the phone or open the door when anyone came looking for her. I always felt bad for my Aunt Esther especially. She would hold her finger on the bell for what seemed like an hour, staring up at our window, and shout my mother’s name until her voice cracked. Me and Dev would try to peak out the window in case it was one of our friends, but my mother would whisper a scream, “Don’t you dare open that door. It’s your Aunt Esther.” I don’t know how she’d know, but she did and we were not allowed to have any connection to the outside world when the darkness came.

I can only imagine the darkness is visiting my mother these days. I suppose I never realized that the darkness could shut me out of her life. Maybe I thought I was special. I miss my mother so much, but I know that when she finally does call me, I won’t pick up. I’ll be overcome with hurt and anger that she left me alone again...with just an empty promise of her protection. Another lesson on loving women that I’ll have to unlearn....



*Self-Portrait by Anna-Marie López*

## Madre mía/Mother of Mine

*Janette Álvarez*

I can't help but scream "MOM!" I begin to think, "How did I get here, how did I possibly get here?!" I'm kicking and flapping my arms and know that I'm swimming but feel as if Yemaya has caught me by a rope and has lassoed me in. I'm fighting and struggling trying hard to get out. I only find myself getting tired and having moments of darkness. I knew this was how I was going to die. Yes, I lived a life of sin but not one of regrets. I remember taking that first kiss but never thinking that I would feel the urge to give it back. As if I owed something for not living a world of richness, passion, and love.

I'm a young woman that's weak, panicking, and seeing herself slowly give into a power, the Goddess Yemaya, her ocean. I'm drowning now. "¿Me puede ayudar?" ("Can you help me?"), I scream out, still composed because I catch myself asking and not demanding. It is as if I wanted to be remembered as being polite and ladylike, just as my mother always taught me. "¡Por favor, ayúdeme!" ("Please help me!"), I asked again. I see a man swimming off to the side, but who after hearing me scream is now making his way over to where I am. Though it doesn't make me feel any better, I tell him, "No puedo tocar el piso." ("I can't touch the ground.") He tells me, "Swim harder," but the harder I try the easier it is for Yemaya to take me in.

I think of my last goodbye. It was Thursday morning; we had just crossed the bridge and exited off the first ramp. One block before my mother's house we stopped to kiss, and at that point I thought, "I should know better than this." The last time I did this I was flashed with car headlights as she and I kissed. My mother practically dragged me out of the car by my hair while saying every Spanish curse word she knew. I was a disgrace, a child not of her womb who lived in sin.

I snap out of my dream world and realize I'm swallowing water and start to taste the bitter salt of Yemaya. I try to find my place with her so that the process is faster or maybe slower, neither of the options seems particularly appealing at the moment. The man is now behind me, speaking to me, cheering me to swim. For an instant I feel like a fish. I wonder how long he has been doing that, I haven't heard anything but feel everything. I'm able to look around me and feel calm as if this were now my new home. I swim to the side as he shouts, "¡No te desesperes!" I have to swim to the side, not get restless and give up. My senses are heightened and I find myself with a rush of energy, I want to win this. I realize I wanted to break free of Yemaya's arms.

The relationship my mother and I had was not the same, I couldn't stare into her eyes but I could spend days staring into my lover's gaze. My mother did not agree with my life of sin, as she would say "¡Pecadora!" It wasn't



my fault that she knew. Everyday I woke up wanting to give it back. I never intended to let my mom down. I never wanted her to be a part of my life that way. We had such a complete relationship by simply talking about the simple things, by never talking about it.

I find myself walking, walking out of sand that seems to taunt me easily pulling me in. I look at the sand and begin to follow the shells as if a trail is left from someone else for me to follow. I see my mother. “Te estaba buscando, no te metas muy adentro.” (“I was looking for you, don’t go in too deep.”) I begin to cry instantly, draining my insides out. My mother asks me what’s wrong, I instantly answer with a hug as hard as I can with all the strength that is left in me. Holding her, I see the man walking toward the pier. In the blink of an eye, he becomes a Van Gogh painting. I silently say, “Thank you.”

After I’ve had a minute to compose myself, the lady from the seafood hut brings me salt-water crackers and a chilled beer. “Tienes que tener cuidado mi’ja.” (“You have to be careful.”) Maybe next time I won’t get a second chance. Calmly, her skirt sways back and forth like a curtain caught by an open window, her wrist suffocating under gold bracelets, she slowly hums her path away. The smoke from the miniature bonfires set sporadically by the huts begins to bother my mom. She passes her fingers through her hair as if she can feel the smoke being cleaned, her nose twitches, and her eyes water. As if she has just heard the woman’s advice she says, “Sentí un sentimiento y eso fue cuando fui a buscarte.” (“I felt this feeling and that’s what made me go looking for you.”) I don’t tell her I screamed for her when I was enthralled under Yemaya, that all I wanted was to tell her that I loved her and that I understood she was simply Mamá, trying to protect me. So instead, I bite into the salt water crackers, making a noise against our uncomfortable silence.

I fan my hand close to her face to keep the smoke away from her eyes.

## Precious Mother

Remember you are Precious to me Mom, always, this is just for you.

*Myra López*

The one who holds your hand  
When you fall, the one who  
Brushes your hair and tells  
you you are Beautiful, the one  
Who brushes those tears away.  
The one who's there when others  
are gone, our Precious Mother.  
The one who accepts even when  
We are wrong even when  
We are not what she expects.  
Our Precious Mother. When  
we're different she never shuns  
Us, only loves us. The one  
I would kill for, my Precious Mother.  
The one I'm Sorry I hurt  
My Precious Mother. The one  
who always loves me no  
matter what I have done  
or said. My Precious Mother.

Love Myra

## Mamá When You Danced

*Lea E. Arellano*

Querida Mamá  
When you danced  
The whole room filled itself with your happiness  
The mambo rhythms,  
Although in partnership with your inner música,  
Could not hold a candle to the precise drum beats of your tacones  
Tapped out on that happy, but beaten, silly dance floor.

Querida mujer, when you danced  
It was for you —  
Unlike most of what you did,  
When you danced  
It was clearly for you!

Mother, wife, daughter, and 24-7 worker  
When you danced, sexism waited outside the El Casino Ballroom  
Like a frustrated husband pitching fits  
Because he is not the center of the Universe for one minute;  
Waited until you were full and reluctantly ready to once again  
Enter that world of doing for others.

### **Singing:**

*Y volver, volver, volver a tu cárcel otra vez*

Mamá when you danced the whole world was right  
Your repertoire was vast  
El danzón, el cha cha cha, las cumbias,  
Rumba, merengue, corridas y mas.  
I never saw you happier than when you danced  
And took command of the floor  
And the whole room breathed with you.

El baile — the road of temporary liberation for a Madre Mexicana  
Who had enough passion to fill 100 cenotes with fire and humo.

I can still hear you singing (along with your kitchen radio) those torrid Mexican love songs I grew up hearing and ingesting.

You, mamá, slapping tortillas as you sang:

**Singing:**

*Escúchame  
Quiero decirte algo  
Que quizás no esperes  
Doloroso tal vez  
Atiéndeme  
Que aunque me duela el alma  
Yo necesito hablarte  
Y así lo haré*

Mamá your wings spread wide and powerful  
When you sang and danced  
Your flight impossible to interrupt  
For those few moments  
The cage called 'marriage' never could stop your dancing and singing...  
The only things you kept for yourself.

**Singing:**

*Cucurucucu — paloma  
Cucurucucu — no llores*

## Casanova

(circa 1991)

*Cathy Arellano*

Sonia and I are at The Five with Uncle Tony.

“Just a few drinks,” we said when we entered hours ago. I know my sister Lisa is his favorite, but that’s okay, tonight it’s Uncle, me, and my girlfriend Sonia.

We’re just “having a few” and “shooting the shit” as Uncle likes to say. We’re playing pool and trying to make the games interesting, but it’s not working. I remember now how glad I am that I don’t ever sign my name up on the chalkboards to play in the dyke bars.

“Monica! You’re beautiful,” Uncle tells the woman behind the counter.

He looks kind of handsome tonight in a plain white t-shirt and grey slacks. His mustache is neatly trimmed and he smells good too. As usual, there’s Tres Flores in his hair, a little Old Spice on his neck, and Right Guard guarding his pits. Uncle keeps it simple for his nights out.

Uncle points the cue stick at the woman.

“Micki, have you met the bartender? She’s the prettiest, baddest-assed bartender in the Mission,” he tells me. Again.

He takes his shot.

“Yeah, Uncle. Hi again Monica,” I say then shoot.

“Hi Micki.”

“She won’t marry me, Mick. Did I tell you that?”

He doesn’t wait for me to answer and shoots. He finally makes a bad shot and knocks one of my balls in.

“Damn her,” he says glaring at Monica.

“Geez, Uncle,” I say and look at Sonia, remembering that I met her in a Women’s Studies class.

“Be nice, Tony. He’s usually a gentleman,” Monica tells me.

“It’s just an act, baby. He’s really sweet just like I said,” I whisper to Sonia.

“Aw, go to hell, Monica,” Uncle says flipping her off.

“Wait until you meet the men in my family,” Sonia laughs as she walks over to take her turn.

“Don’t be an asshole in front of your niece, Tony,” Monica says in a much more serious tone than she means with her smiling face.

“I love you, Monica. Marry me,” he pleads.

“I swear this guy...” She shakes her head and laughs out loud.

After she takes her turn, Sonia walks over to me. This time I’m sitting down and pull her onto my lap. She smoothes my collar, tugs on my earlobe, and drives me crazy. She gives me a long, sweet kiss letting me know that we

should go soon.

“Uncle it’s your shot,” I remind him to move the game along.

Then Sonia stands up. Bent over the table, Uncle chambers the pool stick, back and forth, ready to put the game away. I’ve never heard him talk about being a good pool player, but I guess after all his years inside bars, he’s picked up a few things. Sonia stands opposite Uncle. He chambers and just as he’s about to release, she wiggles her ass. We all laugh. He tries to focus again, but can’t.

“Damn Sonia. You’ve shot my concentration to hell, girl.”

He lays down his cue stick.

“Hey Monica, Sonia used her secret weapon,” he says to her as he pretends to hide his pointing at Sonia’s ass from my view.

We laugh again.

“Oh Tony,” Sonia waves him away and walks to the jukebox.

I think to myself that if she weren’t with me, Uncle might give Sonia his current highest compliment for a woman. You can almost time it when he watches “Wheel of Fortune” and someone guesses a letter.

“R!”

She walks across the stage and Uncle gives Vanna his seal of approval, “Poetry in motion!”

I join Sonia at the jukebox and punch in some Al Green, Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, and a few others. Mom always had the living room cabinet shelves filled with stacks of LPs and 45s. There were always so many records around that my sister and I learned to see a flash of color and know the record company. Blue with a road map on top was Motown, yellow with brown on top was TAMLA, red with black writing was usually Atlantic, but sometimes they used yellow. Then we learned the songs on each label and we’d play “Name That Tune” with our cousins. We creamed them every time, always guessing the song in less than four notes, sometimes just one: “Dis...” “Distant Lover, Marvin Gaye!” we’d shout.

“Mick,” Uncle sounds serious now. He’s sitting at one of the bar’s small tables. Sonia and I join him.

“Yeah, Uncle,” I answer him, feeling serious now also.

“Your mother. Very good woman.”

My eyes start to water. It’s been ten years and that quick, I’m a kid, a crybaby all over again. Mom. The woman, the wound I’m always running away from and right back into.

“Yeah, she was, Uncle,” I agree with him, looking away from his and Sonia’s eyes.

Sonia reaches for my hand. I stroke her palm with my thumb.

“Beautiful person, Mick,” he continues.

It sounds like beut-fool. He turns his head to the side and closes his eyes. He misses her. I miss her. She died ten years ago and some days are just



worse than others for us. The doctors never could tell us exactly why. They just knew that her liver and kidneys stopped working. She didn't hide booze in the backyard like Uncle George. She didn't smoke her Kool Milds for 30 plus years like Nana. But there she was 45 and in and out of the hospital in a month.

"Yeah, she was a pretty lady," I say as I nod my head.

"I goddamn love that woman," he mumbles then turns to look at Sonia. "My sister...helluva woman," he says as he pulls his left, brown, man hand up to his now squinting eyes.

"Good times. Your Mom 'n' me."

He flexes his right arm, points from his chest to the space just to the right of him, in and out, in and out. I can almost see her there.

I squeeze Sonia's hand.

"Hey Ton,' she'd say," he tells us.

He raises his right hand and points as if she were pointing at him.

"Or 'Toe.' She called me Toe," he giggles.

His giggles fizzle to mumbles.

"Aw shit," he says and drops his hand.

Monica looks over. I nod that he's okay.

I remember his "Toe's." I remember my "Mija's."

## Marilu

(A true story)

*L. Vera*

Marilu could still hear the words over and over.... She was 12 when her mother told her to sit down in the bed with her and foretold the outcome of her losing battle: “Yo...yo me voy a morir.” She could hear those words repeat over and over in her head.... The calmness in her tone did nothing to prevent that her world at that moment would turn upside down, and that her own heart would do a free fall and sink into a bottomless abyss...where it would stay for many years.

“Yo me voy a morir”.

“Yo me voy a morir”.

“Yo me voy a morir”.

It played like a broken record.

The bus had taken off to the cemetery. She wasn't allowed to go. Appalled, she had cursed the moment her father sent her off to run an errand. It was a trick he played to prevent her from going. When she returned, she found out they had gone to bury her. She ran to the streets, past all cars whose drivers thought she was a dumb kid who was not looking. She pushed people, trying to catch the next bus that went to the cemetery. She remembered the air was hot, but at that moment, all blood running through her 12-year old body felt icy cold. She felt as though her own body had been emptied on the streets, as her heart was being buried several kilometers away forever in the municipal cemetery of La Piedad, Michoacán. She caught a bus, and shortly after she saw trucks coming in the opposite direction full of people she recognized, her aunts, her sister, her father, her brother. In a scream, she immediately ordered the bus driver to stop. She ran on the side of the road to catch the trucks. She does not remember who hugged her at that moment. She does not remember who might have offered a word of consolation, or comfort...she just broke down, screaming, and asked, “Why? That was my mother. I wanted to bury her. Why? Why? I had the right to be there. I wanted to be there. That was MY mother!”

She does not remember her father's face at that moment. She remembers the grief everyone felt, but amid the confusion, his face might have seemed hard and contained. Who knows, if there had not been people around, he might have tried to knock off her hysteria with a slap on the face. Time did not erase the resentment she would forever carry against him. The rest of her childhood, she could not cry, she was not allowed to cry. When she did, her feelings were minimized. She was told, “What are you crying for? We are all going to die.”

She feared for herself and her siblings. She felt as though they were all lost. She felt like part of a litter of stray puppies that would bounce from

home to home in the next few years. She now felt there was no one to guide her, no one to speak for her or on her behalf, no one to throw their love at her unconditionally. When she was alone, she might have cried, she might have healed in a bad way, she might have hardened. Her wounds re-opened every now and then, when she saw her younger siblings hug and cry at night and ask for their mother. With time, all of them hardened. She saw her three-year-old sister grow into her silence and her grief shoved into a box and buried six feet under. She herself was incapable of getting close and offering a hug, a smile, a word.

She still remembers the night of the wake. At her aunt's house, the coffin lay in the living room and the air smelled of Mexican hot chocolate, flowers and candle wax. The whispers of the people in unison praying the rosary might have numbed her, but she felt the looks of pity hit her like rocks, and she couldn't help but to look down the entire time.

She looked down at her mother's coffin. She saw her mother's face, hardened but beautiful. That was her mother. She looked as though she was sleeping, as though she was alive. At that moment memories brought her mother back to life. She saw her mother running around in the kitchen when she used to gather ingredients to bake donuts. They baked together, and that was one of her fondest memories. She remembered her ironing, cleaning, doing laundry, feeding the ducks, picking up pomegranates from the trees in the front patio. She remembered her making breakfast against the sunny east side of the kitchen. She remembered her mother's voice that told her with certainty: "Yo me voy a morir." She heard that over and over during the wake until she remembered a different tone in her mother's voice. She remembered her mother's frustration and pain, a solitude and isolation that broke her voice, when she was emotionally and physically collapsing and folding and sinking. She saw her mother swing the broom down on top of her head. Whose pain was greater? She also recalled that her mother used to hit her. She used to hit her a lot.

## Not a Virgin

*Andrea Dulanto*

My life was a teen movie without the storybook ending. I didn't dance with Kevin Bacon. I didn't kiss Jake Ryan. Yet I held on to the complete make-over fantasy: I would come back next year with new clothes, new hairstyle, four more inches of height, larger breasts. This would give me the life I wanted, even if I didn't know what life I wanted. I never got the complete make-over although sometimes I found an outfit that transformed me – my black prom dress, my mother's burgundy blouse from the 1970's, my black mini-skirt. But clothes were never enough. My best make-over was scotch in a thermos which made me into the lead character in my own movie – Sandy at the end of *Grease*, Ally Sheedy in the last scenes of *The Breakfast Club* – instant transformation.

Yet scotch didn't help me lose my virginity.

My friends slowly became part of that nebulous other realm – the not-virgins. Diana lost hers when she was 13. Kate, Xiomara – they all had sex. I had Jackie Collins, *The Thornbirds* mini-series, *Days of Our Lives*, love songs by Phil Collins on the radio. Sex was a myth, an image. My friends traveled back and forth to this Mount Olympus, and returned with stories about what they had seen, what they had learned from their last sexual experience – how to avoid collision with a headboard, how to dispense with underwear for easy access, how to undress in the backseat of a car.

Did I want to have sex? I could have fucked Leonard, or Terry. Why did I hold back? I didn't even know any more if I wanted a boyfriend. Maybe I liked girls better.

My sophomore year of high school, I took a pair of scissors to my *Purple Rain* poster. I discarded the figures of His Royal Purpleness and the rest of The Revolution, then carefully cut out the picture of Wendy and Lisa to paste on my bedroom wall. Wendy Melvin and Lisa Coleman – guitarist and keyboard player in Prince's band. The poster showed Lisa standing close behind Wendy with her arm around her waist. Wendy wore a paisley orange sherbet coat with white sneakers and pale tights. Lisa wore black. They had matching asymmetrical hairstyles: buzz cut on one side, a cascade of curls on the other. (Diana had the same haircut in our sophomore year. The nuns didn't approve.) Wendy and Lisa had "the sex look" – their mouths slightly open, eyes half-asleep as if summoned from bed. Were they lesbians? Maybe they were pretending.

I had more of a crush on Wendy who seemed less serious than Lisa, hunched over a keyboard. Wendy smiled broadly behind her guitar, ready to divulge a quick wit. And she had that scene in *Purple Rain*.

I never saw it at the movie theater. It was rated R. Ma wouldn't let me.



When the film came out on videocassette, my mother watched it before my brother or I could get near the VCR. She promptly returned it to the store.

“*No es una película para ti. Esa gente están havee sex.*” That movie is not for you. Those people are having sex.

Two years later, I borrowed the film from someone at school, waited until I was alone in the house. By then, I had seen an actual porno, so I didn’t bother to rewind Appollonia and Prince’s mild sex scenes. More graphic, more interesting was Wendy’s simulation of oral sex during “Computer Blue” as she fell to her knees in front of Prince’s guitar while they both performed a simultaneous rift on their “instruments.” I hit rewind to see that look on her face – raw, vulnerable. I had never felt the sexual power of guitars. I was sold.

Sophomore year, I also had a crush on Holly in my Drama class. She was a thin girl with a light brown pixie hair cut. An extrovert, a cheerleader – not all that bright. She spent most of Drama class getting in trouble for talking and laughing with her friend, Kelly, a feathered blond whose antics reminded me of the class clowns in grade school. Kelly tied the ends of her shirt in a bow like Daisy Duke, or she pulled her sweater over her head and pretended to be a nun. Her comedic gifts were wasted, because most of the acting in Drama class was from plays like *Macbeth*. Holly was Kelly’s straight man, her “goodnight Gracie.” They were Mutt and Jeff, and I was inexplicably mesmerized. Holly was my crush, but Kelly got me with her humor.

My other crush that year was Susan M. – half Cuban, brown wavy hair to her shoulders, tortoise-shell glasses, flat stomach – daily stomach exercises, she said. Good friends with Susan A., the Filipina girl with black hair down to her waist. When Diana and I were alone, we called them “the Susans” as if they were one entity. They probably knew they needed something else to separate them – maybe that’s why Susan M. told us to call her Pelusa.

Susan M. listened to The Fine Young Cannibals’, New Order. She snuck into downtown Miami clubs like Fire & Ice. She loved Andy Warhol. She considered doing acid. Too cool to be friends with me.

But Pelusa was less intimidating.

She sat in front of me in Health class where our gym teachers taught sophomores about proper nutrition, first-aid instruction, and CPR. While they demonstrated the correct way to apply bandages, or lectured about body shapes (*ectomorph, endomorph*), Pelusa and I passed notes about how everyone pretended to be something they weren’t, and how could anyone believe in God?

Susan M. wouldn’t have confessed her depressions, her weirdness. But Pelusa leaned over her desk in Health class to quote The Doors: “people are strange when you’re a stranger.”

She loved Bob Marley; she drew peace-signs on her notebooks, a closet hippie.

She was also a virgin.

“Why haven’t you had sex?” I asked. I couldn’t believe she hadn’t.

“No reason. Sex isn’t everything.”

Diana had always touted the virtues of non-virginity. She took her quotes from George Michael: “Sex is natural, sex is good – not everybody does it, but everybody should.” Diana and Kate could talk about God, death, philosophy – but it all came back to sex – that was the true-knowledge, the apple tree. I wasn’t part of that circle, I was incomplete – “when you have sex, you’ll understand.”

Who needed this knowledge from Mount Olympus? Pelusa and I had our own realm in Health class – God, death, philosophy – we *were* complete, this was the only circle with no talk of boys or sexual exploits. But why did I keep thinking there was something else? Not Mount Olympus, not sex in the backseat of a car with football players, but something else? I stared at Pelusa during class – her brown wavy hair, her flat stomach which she didn’t think of as flat (her alluring insecurities), her thin bra straps visible through her white uniform shirt.

I got drunk in my bedroom, and called Diana to confess my crushes: Wendy, Holly, Pelusa.

“It’s not weird,” she said. “I don’t know if I could have a relationship, but I might have sex with a girl one day.”

Was there nothing I could call my own! Not only did Diana accept that I liked girls, but she thought about it too. It was good to have that acceptance, but Diana couldn’t shut herself out of any experience – she had to make her way into everything. I shouldn’t have been surprised though – there were occasional lesbian trysts in the romance novels that we borrowed from Diana’s mother. Jackie Collins gave one of her main characters, Lucky, a brief liaison with a woman. It wasn’t completely new – this idea – girls with girls.

“But I don’t know if I want to have sex with a girl,” I said.

“Well, you haven’t even had sex with a guy,” said Diana. “Maybe you need to try that first, so you know for sure.”

“It’s not about sex!”

“What is it about?”

“I don’t know – maybe I want to kiss her – can’t we kiss, and not have sex?”

“You could – but I think lesbians do more than just kiss.”

“I’m not a lesbian!”

“God! So sensitive, Petunia! I didn’t say you were!”

“I’m just saying – if I want to kiss a girl, it doesn’t mean I’m a lesbian – right?”

She paused. Maybe I shouldn’t have said so much, but that’s what happened when I was drunk.

“I don’t think you are,” she answered. “You’re a virgin – how can you



know what you are if you haven't had sex with a guy?"

It all came back to sex. Sex with boys.

But what did it mean to be a lesbian?

I dreamed about certain guys – didn't that mean I was straight? Actors, movie stars – Andrew McCarthy and Ally Sheedy inside the shower stall in *St. Elmo's Fire*, her broken strand of pearls. P.T., my blond boy, my unrequited eighth grade crush.

But what did it mean to be a lesbian?

I had a memory from kindergarten in Queens, New York. I stared at a classmate's bare midriff – she was Puerto Rican, her brown stomach showed underneath her frilly halter top. She looked at me in disgust.

"Stop it!" she said.

I couldn't. Was I a lesbian then?

When I was in the seventh grade, my best friend Lacey and I spent every recess by ourselves, walking through the field behind St. Lawrence. *They say you only like girls*, someone told me – and it was like someone had suddenly forced me off a carnival ride – nauseous, dizzy – the sensation of shifting earth. But the earth didn't move, I was the one who shifted. This didn't make it any easier to get my balance.

Why were they saying that? How could I make it right?

"They're lying," I said.

I refused to walk the field. Lacey and I stayed with the other kids on the playground swings, kicked our legs back and forth to see how high we could get. Nauseous, dizzy – a different kind of imbalance, almost welcome, because no one could say anything about us anymore – we were like everyone else, kicking our legs back and forth, normal.

Was I a lesbian then?

I wanted to be closer to Pelusa more than anyone else. I gave her my journal. I wanted her to read my drunken confessions – not about my feelings for her, I couldn't write any of that down yet – I wanted her to see the depressions, the rants, the philosophical babble – did anything in that journal make sense? I wanted her to know, I wanted her to tell me.

"Some parts are hard to read," she said.

"What do you mean?"

Maybe it was too emotional, too honest – but I didn't want to back down, I wanted her to know everything, I wanted these intimacies.

"The handwriting," she said. "It's hard to read."

I acted like this was nothing, as if there were supposed to be sections she couldn't read.

"Oh, those are probably the parts when I'm drunk."

"Yeah, your writing looks funny."

"But what did you think?"

"I can't read half of what you're saying."

I wanted to give her my secret thoughts. Instead, I gave her hieroglyphics.

By the end of sophomore year, I had lost her – I had lost the Pelusa in Health class. She was the one who backed down. Not completely, but she wasn't the same as before. Did she come out of her depressions before or after I gave her my journal? Either way, she made her decision: "Happiness is better."

She wanted to be happy; she wanted me to be happy.

I wanted the Pelusa from Health class who thought everything was bullshit, who said people only had religion to give them a reason to live.

Happy Pelusa made me wary.

Junior year, Happy Pelusa was in ascendance. She laughed too loud, made plans for college, told me to stop reading *The Bell Jar*.

She wrote me well-meaning notes – *why are you wallowing in oblivion and self-pity when we're too young to know everything?* I saved all her words even the truisms that made me cringe, the "tough love" tactics – *it's like you stay depressed or act that way to get attention.*

I didn't want concern.

I wanted her to be in love with me, the same way that I was in love with her.

*Dear Pelusa: You are the real reason for most of my depression.*

I didn't write that. I wanted her to know this without having to tell her, and I wanted an answer in one of her notes: *don't be depressed, you have me, you can be with me.*

Instead, she wrote: *Maybe you should get professional help.*

But Pelusa could give my journal to the nuns, she could watch them lead me away in a straitjacket (which was what happened to "crazy" people, wasn't it? What else did she mean by "professional help?"), and I would have written her perfumed letters from some sterile institution. I would have sent her sweet nothings between electro-shocks.

Pelusa lost her virginity in Australia. She came back from her summer trip before senior year with her Mount Olympus stories – the hallucinogens, the beer and sex.

"I wanted to be done with it," she said.

Three years at Madonna Academy, and I watched Diana, Kate, and Xiomara give themselves up to the sex gods, but I didn't care. I had my place – I was "the virgin" who told them to use condoms.

That same summer before senior year, Susan A. had sex for the first time on her living room couch while her parents prayed at a church meeting. *Family Ties* on TV. Alex P. Keaton, witness to her deflowerment. "What would we do, baby, without us?"

I would be a virgin forever, it didn't matter.

But when Pelusa lost her virginity, I became more determined to lose my own – even if it was with a man.



Why shouldn't Pelusa have sex with a scruffy boy in the outback? Why should she think of me?

Maybe I had been saving myself for her. Maybe I felt betrayed.

If this were a teen movie, I wouldn't be the lead. I was Duckie in *Pretty in Pink*, Anthony Michael Hall in *Sixteen Candles* – boys who never got the girl.

Sex was everything.



*The Virgin* by Carmen N. Rodríguez



## Lover's Delight

*Griselda Suárez*

A Chinese finger trap with warm syrup  
 that makes the fingers tingle  
 The walls are lined with  
 truffles. Melting velvet  
 drenching the index and fore fingers  
 The heat is like the earth's core contained in a clam shell  
 It travels through the cuticle and into the epidermis  
 soaking the capillaries  
 flushing the bloodstream  
 It is like sweating garlic in butter  
 Sweet and pungent. The scent stays  
 on for a couple of days like a smile on  
 a lover's face.

## Shorty

*Daisy Hernández*

I meet her at Julie's. It's Saturday night, and that means every tri-state Puerto Rican lesbian is dancing salsa and having too many Coronas at Julie's in Manhattan. I've always wondered about that club. I mean, how many fucking Latinas you know named Julie? Julissa, sure. Julia, yeah. But Julie?

So, there I am on the dance floor with my buddy Marisol showing off my best steps when all of a sudden I do a little spin and I'm staring straight at some woman's tits and I'm not talking about the kind of cleavage where it's two droopy tetas propped up with a wired bra. This is the real stuff. Two round, large breasts squeezed together in a baby tee. Just as I'm about to bend my neck back to look up at the homegirl, Marisol spins me around, laughing. "Oye loca, careful before you get some old butch kicking your ass for staring at her woman."

I lean into Marisol. "Did you see the cleavage on that girl?"

Marisol's short curly hair smells like oranges but I know it's just that nasty anti-frizz gel she uses. She shakes her head. "Lou, she's too tall for you. La Cleavage wouldn't give you the time of day."

That's why I love Mari. We met at some gay parade years ago and she's the perfect friend, la hermanita who nicknames the new hottie "La Cleavage." That's how well she knows me.

After three more songs, Marisol runs off to kick it to some cutie in high heels, but I stay on the dance floor, dancing solo and watching the old dykes do the best salsa you've ever seen. I also want to see who La Cleavage is with, but she's just hanging with friends. Homegirl has some seriously pin-straight highlighted hair. You know she's Dominican and she gets that shit worked on every week at the salon. Straightened, pulled, tormented. You gotta love her for it.

I'm heading to the bar when she steps up to me and puts a hand on my shoulder. "¿Quieres bailar?"

I start nodding because I'm thinking, but she takes that for a yes and grabs my hand. I'm thinking, "What the fuck?," but girlfriend starts dancing and leading me. Leading me. I wouldn't put up with that shit except I'm at eye level with her tits and I'm a little buzzed from the gin and tonic I had earlier, and it's La India that the DJ's playing. By the end of the first song though, I'm back to myself and I'm trying to lead her but it ain't working. She's too tall or I'm too short. Whatever. I thank her for the dance and say I've got to go, which I do. I need another drink. She nods and goes back to her friends.

From the bar, I check her out. She's hot. She's got the tight pants, the bright lipstick, the big gold earrings. I'm feeling pretty good about myself. "I could

get that if I wanted it," I tell Mari, who's buying her new girl a drink and says, "Right." But what does Mari know? She likes playing it safe. Not that this matters. La Cleavage is too tall. We can't even dance together. So, fuck that.

An hour later, I'm on line at the coat check when I feel a tapping on my shoulder. I turn around and it's cleavage. No, I mean really: It's tetas. That's all I see for a second until I hear La Cleavage ask, "Are you gonna give me your number before you go?"

It's hard to know what to say when you want something you probably shouldn't have and come close to getting it. "Huh?"

"You speak English?" she asks.

"Sí," I say. "I mean, yeah."

The coat check girl asks for my ticket and disappears behind jackets. She's chuckling I notice. Is she laughing at me?

At the bar two old butches are doing shots and hollering, "¡Pa' las mujeres!" That song "Fruta Fresca" is playing and I see Cleavage's friends standing against the wall, shaking their hips and watching us. That bugs me about lesbians: You can't do anything on your own, always gotta have an audience.

"What's your name?" Cleavage asks.

"Luna, but people call me Lou." I make a point of staring at her pointy chin. "And you?"

"Peggy. Peggy Edison."

At that point, it's over. I'm sorry. I don't care how much tits there are. I ain't dating no girl named Peggy Edison. What kind of name is that? Probably some white girl with a tan passing for Puerto Rican.

But then, coat check girl's handing me my jacket and Peggy places her hand on the counter like she owns the coat check booth but is being polite to her employees and says, "Hey nena, you got a pen?"

Something about the way she says "nena" and I know she's Nuyorican. Or at least Dominican. I can hear it in her Spanish. She says it easy like she's been saying it all her life.

\* \* \*

I don't expect her to call or I figure I won't call her back. It's just crazy how tall she is. Tall girls go for other tall girls or they should. But when she leaves me a message with her number, I call my girl Mari.

"You think it'll be weird?"

"What?"

"C'mon bitch, you seen how tall she is."

"Yeah, that girl's all piernas. Your five-foot ass is gonna have to do some climbing, mi'ja." Marisol is laughing.

"I'm 5 feet and 1 inch."

But now Mari's laughing so hard that she puts the phone down.

"You drunk?" I ask when she picks up the receiver.



“I smoked a little but I’m just thinking of your tiny ass with rock climbing gear, making your way up Mt. Pegoña.”

“Mt. what?”

“Your girl Peggy. Pegoña. Don’t you think that’s better? A little more flavor to it?”

I hang up the phone. I ain’t calling Peggy back. Mari’s right. It’s crazy. Climbing gear. Fuck. Not that I couldn’t do it. I can bench press 80 pounds. But shit. Why did the girl have to be so tall? We’d look like freaks. I mean I’ve seen it once. I’d seen this Costa Rican chick, 4 feet 11 inches, and I swear she was kicking it with her girl who was 6 feet like Pegoña. They looked like freaks. Cute, you know, but freaky. I mean, how did they have sex? How could the little one top?

\* \* \*

I call La Cleavage two days later. I don’t believe in passing up hot girls. At the end of the day, I tell Marisol, it’s that. I don’t care how tall Pegoña is, you just do not pass up a girl like that.

“She could do porn with those tits,” I tell Mari.

“Now that you mention it, maybe I saw her...”

“Fuck you Mari.”

The first date’s good. Actually it’s much better than I expected because we’re sitting most of the night, watching a movie then getting something to eat, and honestly I do spend the night trying to figure out why we’re the same height sitting down. Finally, I blurt it out. “You ain’t that tall sitting down.”

She laughs. She has this way of laughing where all of her shakes: boobs, shoulders, tummy, even the pin-straight hair moves. This bitch does not giggle. I hate girls that giggle. It’s so fucking fake, like somebody trying to not fart. I’m always like, “Just laugh, don’t giggle.” Not that I have to tell Pegoña. She’s laughing her ass off.

“You ain’t so short sitting down,” she says, smiling. She reaches across the table and rubs my head. Generally, I hate it when people do that, like I’m some five-year old. But with Pegoña, it’s ok. I close my eyes and she doesn’t take her hands away. “It’s my legs,” she says.

“Your what?” I ask, opening my eyes.

“I’m all legs.” She lifts the edge of her long red skirt. “My torso’s short. I’m 5 feet 11 inches but it’s all legs.”

\* \* \*

After that, I have to fuck her. I don’t care what anyone thinks of me going with a tall girl. I have to at least see her buck naked. I have to go down on her.

I take her home after the second date and it’s not what I expect. I mean usually I don’t get nervous. I’ve been a butch all my life, started dating girls when I turned 12 and I’m 26 now and I’ve never been nervous. But with Pegoña,

it's different. Maybe it's the height thing. I stand there in my kitchen handing her a Corona and thinking: how am I going to pull this off? Or maybe it's something else about her. The girl wears these low cut blouses and the black pants are so tight on her, so she's definitely femme but she's not girly. It's like she's about to kick your ass the way she walks. When she comes into my apartment, she starts thumbing through my CD collection and pulls out what she wants to play.

She makes the first move when we're sitting on the sofa, which is just fine by me, and I'm cursing myself 'cause maybe I should have had more than one beer. I'm too sober. But then we're kissing and it's good. She kisses the way she walks: like she owns everything. And then homegirl just kicks back and takes off her blouse in one move. Here's the kicker: I don't notice her porn star tetas. I mean, I see them and the lacy maroon bra. But there's this tattoo across the lower part of her belly.

"Fuck or fight," I read aloud. When I look up, she's just smiling. "What does that mean?"

"Why don't ya find out for yourself?"

I don't remember what answer I gave cause next thing I know we're wrestling on the Andean rug my moms brought back from Peru. And this ain't like some fake wrestling. The girl's strong and even though I can hold my own and beat her, I realize after a few minutes that we're not going to have sex unless I give up. So I do.

\* \* \*

"Sex with a tall girl ain't nothing like doing it with a short one." That's what I tell Mari a few days later at the bar in Hoboken, where we go for happy hour on Fridays. "It's like you can't get enough." I take another swig of my beer. "Every time you turn around there's more of her. It's fucking great."

"You're seeing her again?"

"Tonight."

Mari shakes her head.

"What?"

"You always get like this," Mari says, waving the bartender over to us.

"Like what?"

"Remember Great Adventure two years ago? You couldn't hit the biggest roller coaster just one time. No. That ain't enough for Shorty. You weren't satisfied till you'd gone on it five times and you're so sick that you're face down puking saliva and they gotta call paramedics. It'll be the same thing with Cleavage."

"Shut up," I say, looking for the cigarettes in my bag and grinning. "And don't call her Cleavage. Have some respect."

## Pensión de viudez

*Elena Madrigal*

*Una bella concurrió a la serenata vestida de hombre, llamando la atención de todos los concurrentes, menos de la policía. Entre algunas personas del bello sexo, por celos o por chiste, se ha aclimatado la moda de usar el vestido del sexo fuerte y como bajo ese disfraz pueden ocultarse algunas mujeres con intenciones poco santas o criminales, la policía no debe descuidarse.*

– Nota de prensa, s. XIX

No, güey, todo es por algo. Antes de pensar siquiera en salir con Luzma, tendría que encamármela, templármela, cogérmela, comérmela o como gustes y mandes llamarle. No es fácil tomar decisiones sobre sexo, pero ahorita me vas a entender. ¿Te acuerdas de Claudia Quintero, la que me mandaba discos y blusas a la oficina, la de los regalitos a cada rato; la del “sí, mi bombón, como tu digas”? Préndeme el cigarro, no seas malita, y te platico de la Quintero.

Un viernes no podía dormir y miraba y miraba el techo de la recámara. Yo estaba así, muy deseosa de un fajecín, de un apapacho, de un abrazo aunque fuera. Entonces, me decidí a darle un chance a la Quintero, que llegaba trastabillando, tequila en mano, y aullando hasta que se le reventaran los pulmones.

Salí al portón, ¡juta!, como en las pelis de rancheros. Muy sonreída, le recibí las canciones, y cuando se acercó con su ramote de flores, le susurré al oído que mandara la música a otra parte y que pasara un ratito. Sentí que me regalaba otro ramo, pero de promesas, con su mirada de norteña, que tan bien le queda. “Sus deseos son órdenes”, me dijo, sin soltarme la barbilla.

El preámbulo fue de antología. Sí, sí, sírveme otro poquito, mana. ¿Y qué iba yo a esperar después de tanta damosidad, de tantos meses de insistencia? Bueno, caballerosidad, paquemientendas. ¿Pues qué iba a esperar? ¡La cogida de mi vida! ¡Ni más ni menos! ¿No?

Para no hacértela larga, me llevó casi cargando a la cama, se bajó los pantalones, medio se bajó la trusa, se me echó encima; chirrinchín, pa’riba y pa’bajo la cadera. Me enteré de que se había venido cuando los ojos se le pusieron en blanco y... sanseacabó. Ni besitos, ni encueraderas, ni toqueteos. Nada. Ni los pezones se me abrieron y una punzadura me atravesó de lo más profundo del vientre hasta patearme el clítoris. Por mi mente centellearon rencorosas las imágenes de torpeza de Fernando, de Agustín, de Horacio, de Arturo. Un marrazo en el pecho bastó para sentir la ausencia de las manos de Marijose y su pericia para arrancarme flores de orgasmos; el ardor de mi piel toda me recordó los tamborileos frenéticos que Marijose me hacía escuchar aquellas tardes en las que iba a ofrecerme Avon y su lengua terminaba jugando

en mi entrepierna. Tres lagrimones, y la regresé a los recuerdos.

La Quintero se incorporó y se vistió. Antes de irse, se atrevió a preguntarme: “¿Quedaste satisfecha?” No le contesté y me prometí nunca más volver a verla.

Pero reapareció, hace como una semana. Raquelito me llamó en su nombre, para pedirme que las acompañara al “Lienzo Charro”, a festejar. Yo tenía ganas de unos drinks, y acepté sin más averiguaciones. Total, llegamos al “Lienzo”, nos trajeron la botana, los chupes y que el animador empieza: “En esta mesa, doña Fulanita cumple 80 años, y sus familiares y amigos le dedican “Las Mañanitas”; en esta otra, don Fulano y su gentil señora festejan sus bodas de ooooo”. Todo el mundo aplaudía a lo imbécil, cuando preguntó: “¿Alguien más tiene algo qué festejar?” Y Raquelito grita: “¡Una pensión de viudez!” Todas soltaron la carcajada, menos yo, porque no entendía.

Mana: resulta que la Quintero había sido casada con un gringo y le acababan de pagar la pensión retroactiva a 27 años, y a partir de ese día le llegaría su chequecito en dólares todos los meses.

Por eso digo, si le voy a dar el sí a Luzma, va a ser porque me garantice la buena cama; de lo contrario yo no puedo arriesgarme a dejar de ser la señora de Quintero, ¿verdad?

Bueno Almita, quita esa cara y vete pidiendo la cuenta.

## Bendita eres

*María Teresa Escolán Nuila*

*Dios te salve Dios te salve MaríaMaríaMaría  
Llena eresllena eres de graciaidegraciadegracia  
El señorelseñorelseñor  
Es contigo*

*contigo  
contigo*

*Bendita eres Bendita eres Bendita eres...*

She reaches from inside her sleep across the bed,  
across my body to a kiss.  
Her eyes in morning light more, still closed.  
From the other side of my dream, I still hear the voice speaking...  
Rezando,

*Serpents can't sleep together  
The voice echoes inside like the prayers.*

*we can  
I hear my own voice respond.*

We are

In night,  
In dreams,  
Awake

She coils around me  
And I coil

Kiss to kiss  
And tongue to tongue

To sea

To touch

To earth



To suck

My most desire

My most intense wanting

es

Ella.

La sede de mi deseo,

Como la sangre para el alma.

Bendita eres.

Y Bendita soy.

## Untitled

*Marta Collazo*

Tranquilas Palabras  
 Quiet words like razors  
 Beet red  
 Sweet palabras  
 Words with too much flesh  
 Naked  
 Dulce like sugar cadavers  
 En el día de los muertos  
 Palabras  
 Clean  
 Censored  
 Controlled  
 The sooner we learn to talk  
 The better we get at lying  
 Words/palabras  
 There is no linguistic  
 For a heavy heart  
 Words white  
 Like weddings/bodas  
 Quinceañera  
 Sweet sixteen words  
 That itch  
 Of captivity kan-kan dresses  
 Palabras  
 Like the kind Cyrano sung  
 Proclaimed  
 Fat  
 Juicy words  
 Palabras que apestan  
 Stink  
 Our face is an instrument  
 For forming  
 Intelligent  
 Respectable  
 Jibber jabber  
 Sitting below our bowels  
 Left here  
 In hell on earth

Words/palabras  
 That drip  
 From sunlight  
 Caged inside our chest  
 Sacrilegious  
 Running hard  
 That say  
 the devil  
 has three heads  
 is at best bisexual  
 palabras/words  
 that could never justify  
 that up until this moment  
 one simple  
 uncomplicated life  
 feels paralyzed  
 in self worth  
 imagining life without you.

**viernes silencioso**

For my wife

*Claudia Narváez-Meza*

shoulder of a cayenne sky  
slips in between us  
where we lay  
hours after lovemaking  
lucid harmony of hands

my cheek to your hipbone  
temple of my beginning  
my ear to the ocean's violet  
outside our window  
iridescent hues  
cleave at our sleep  
your breath stirring

you murmur into the pillow  
reach for me in sleep  
your brown back a shifting delta  
beneath purple symmetries  
of dewy leaves

I am humbled in this vigil  
over your dreaming head  
knowing the moon's pull  
as waves heave their bodies  
against the jagged teeth of rocks.

## Serpent Street Kiss

*Griselda Suárez*

I watch Veterana kiss her Rucca on the serpent street.  
Veterana catches my eyes and senses the wolf in me.  
Veterana and her Rucca spend the little money they have  
on a motel room.

Veterana's long day of hanging with her homeboys at the corner,  
takes her back to the same place to survive the night.  
East L.A. can be a sanctuary,  
a confessional for those who love like they please.  
All Veterana wants is her Rucca's pomegranate lips outlined in black.

The Rucca comes back for a taste of honey.  
Walking away in front of me in scuffed high heels,  
she smiles and shines and doesn't care her hair is wild in the wind,  
her makeup smudged from sweat.

I am the only one who sees their good-bye that marks the  
unknown time to meet again. Tomorrow. A month.

Veterana lights a cigarette, shows me her tattoos  
as she rolls up her flannel in the middle of spring.

*Rucca: femme girlfriend, homegirl, wifey*

# Mariposa

*Doris Moromisato*

Porque no puedo estar sola  
sino te amo  
por eso te invento  
en cada curva de cada lado.

Because I love you  
is why I can't be alone  
I imagine you  
in each curve of each place

Si se hace noche en estas manos  
yo te invento  
cuando desdoble una palabra  
y tú  
estás dentro  
mariposa dormida.

When I hold night in these hands  
I imagine you here  
When I unfold a word  
you  
are inside  
a sleeping butterfly

Translated by Toshiya Kamei



## Idilio

*Mariana Romo-Carmona*

There was the snapping of clean sheets on the clothes line and the sweet fear that they might be caught by someone's mother standing bowlegged, hands-on-hips next to her laundry basket. Their own linens snap in the wind, warm smell of belly and thighs strained, starch on cotton batiste, made filmy and shiny stiff from the iron. Hands push on skin holding themselves close, to each other, to the wall painted lemon and the fleeting shadows of the grapes golden ripe from the arbor. It is the hour before tea time and the time they've stolen away is ending.

Sunday is the day of rushed and unmet expectations. Another white ribbon is starched, ironed and bowed tightly to her braid. Lemon juice on the comb subjugates hair close to the scalp, to last obediently through the visit to grandparents. Bow on head, petticoat and socks gleaming white, blue dress and pouting lip from mother's admonishments about behaving like a señorita, she sits primly with a grown-up cup of tea on her lap. Sister pinches surreptitiously on the arm and disassembles her hard won composure, but promises of chewing gum and an outing to the beach from a loving aunt still the sniffles and end the fight.

Looking up from the long ride back on the bus that smells and creaks along Avenida Catedral she finds another head wearing sky-colored bows in the row up ahead, a fortuitous encounter. Her heart thumping now, hearing nothing of the family gossip, only wind rushing. The head with the sky-blue bows turns and bestows a smile. No tears, only a trembling lip. They walk blissfully back through the park and behind the boat house, where there is a single opportunity for a whispered adieu and fingers intertwined.

School days are measured hiding behind pear trees, waiting for notes to be read. Playing tag, her skirt is torn, and she loses her only school handkerchief. On Thursday, the day when the second clean smock is ironed and the buttons resown on the sleeves, she loses her fountain pen and is afraid to go home. Her father has given her the pen for being grown up, and grown-ups don't lose their things. Not their pens, or their monogrammed handkerchiefs even if this one was embroidered by herself, in fourth grade, with the cheap thread that ran its colors in the wash, long ago. She waits by the bench in the park until dusk blends with the dust raised by boys in shorts playing soccer, until her stomach murmurs loudly, and a cool pair of hands comes from behind to cover her eyes. The muscle in her neck aches from holding still and being kissed, hugged, and told she is loved desperately, then kissed again. When she goes home, late for tea, her smock already dusty from the park and her pen missing, there will be harsh words and punishments, but on the park bench she is only a sailboat

adrift, a seagull laughing, a willow draping fingers, and the braided head of another girl is leaning gently on her shoulder.

Saturday is only a half-day of school but a full day of everything else. There are chores to go home for, a visit from godmother, and an uncle returning from the service. Yet the teacher is an ally unaware, or does she know. In her slim black skirt and pleated shirt, the teacher bends over copybooks, keeps her handkerchief tucked under the brown leather strap of her watch on her left wrist. She smells of essence of flowering pine and her hair, oh, her hair remains obedient at the temples in a mystical wave, no lemon juice needed. Raising her gaze just slightly, the teacher catches them whispering and calls them to her, orders them to stay behind to help clean erasers, chalkboard, and to dust the botanical installation for Monday's exam. Ignoring them again, she returns to her duties, double-checking assignments and only looking at the class when the girls in the back row raise their murmuring to the level of loud pigeons. In the front row, under the shared wooden desk, their hands brush together, but her fingers linger dangerously, rubbing skin, knucklebone, cuticle and fingernail. The sin of wanting to possess.

Other days are cruel, other days go flying past, kites made of newspaper flutter perversely to the ground. On the sidewalk, her cousin fights strategy with strategy using the string dipped carefully in glue and broken glass to cut the twine of other kites in fierce air combat. Her hands bleed sometimes from little nicks she acquired helping him prepare the string. This is how she feels, twirled and turned and pushed laughing by the girls' cannonball game in the playground, cut by invisible strings, chafed and martyred when she knows she must be separated from her love. In the playground, pear trees blooming, yellow sand scuffing their black shoes, the girls form two teams to play cannonball and link arms all in a line, dodging and weaving to avoid the hits from the pink rubber ball aimed with increasing certainty. The game provokes shoving, arms embracing favorite friends, the contact of their bodies the final prize for withstanding the full fire of the ball. They tie each other's smocks in the back, rub a knee, stroke a bruised wrist, or help to braid their hair, and in each touch there is a message: love, rejection, jealousy, seduction, and now this competition for her love. The strings of their looks cut her gaze deeply, cut her skin deeply, cut her heart deeply.

December approaches with the end of year promises. Write me; come to the beach with me; don't forget me; let me keep your hair ribbon until the Fall. In the playground, the flowers have dropped from the trees. The dark leaves rustle in the haze of a sleepy sun after lunch while a warm breeze slithers between the desks and the legs of the girls in the front row. The teacher will soon give the word to release each one of them to recess, but she holds their attention taut, the breeze notwithstanding. There is a poetry contest, a dance recital, a gymnastics exhibition, and a winner to be chosen for a painting of the naval battles of 1879. The teacher halts the passing of the notes midway

between the girls, holding them between slim fingers as she talks in measured accents about the coming graduation, puberty, modesty, and menstruation. No one listens anymore. The breeze coils by the windows. The bell rings.

Market days are yellow, and wash days are blue, blue with a hint of the bluing powders her mother puts in the rinse water for the sheets. Sundays are open with a tinge of rose, but she is melancholy. She has not kissed her love nor received an answer to any of her notes. The teacher held them in her hands and mercifully tore them in little dove pieces swept in flight to the dustbin.

She saw them looking at each other, her love and the new girl, and she watched her heart become a dune of gray sand. She dives in the ripples, in the folds of sand, to weep or bury her aching arms in the warmth. When she looks up, many days have passed, one Sunday, two wash days, and market day was approaching. It was time to accompany her mother through the well-known fruit stands, filling the plastic mesh bags with peaches, apricots, watercress, and artichokes.

Summer days are blinding, full of sun. In her aunt's courtyard, she hears her own echoes, counting beats from the jumprope and her sandals on red tiles, and she hears them like heart beats. One, is the wing of a hummingbird, two, the roar of the ocean hitting against rock. She jumps in and out of the pattern of the trellis making shadowed geometry across her body. On the windowsill against white shutters, a geranium blooms in a shallow clay pot that is cracked on one side. She jumps in hypnotic rhythm seeing the crack, the blossom, the patterns of sun and shadow from the trellis, all the world approaching and receding to one field of her vision. If she stretched her seeing farther, she would catch within her nets the body of her love, a blooming ache inside her womb, the pull of gravity, the rounding of her body, or the birthing of her soul. The rope catches the pot; the pot shatters on the tile, and the red geranium petals splayed red and coral on round green leaves, brown earth.

Summer evenings glide on evenly past girls swinging on a swing with brown limbs and hair shorn off at the nape, no more braids, no more ribbons. On the clothesline, the sheets flutter, and on the horizon the moon rises ghostly still, no edges to its roundness yet. The warmth of the day accompanies the sidewalks, the courtyard, the walls painted lemon. There are late bird songs and desserts of raspberries and blackberries, stewed golden papaya in sugar syrup and plain cream, arms entwined and legs lying smoothly against each other, a sprig of mint on the tongue and kissing in small spurts. One, the wing of a hummingbird, two, the roar of the ocean hitting against rock, heartbeat against heart, tongue tips approaching and receding. A net is cast far from herself; a girl who will fly away as surely as summer ends, days turn, rains come, market days are yellow, wash days are blue.

## Declaración de amor

*Nelsy Aldebot Reyes*

Hoy asumo el reto de amarte desde lo más profundo de mi corazón, amarte desde la distancia para que sanemos y aprendamos a movernos desde nuestras individualidades, de manera que encontremos nuestros propios caminos y podamos amarnos desde el respeto y la libertad.

Asumo el reto de continuar esta relación basada en el amor, el respeto, la apertura, la solidaridad, la comprensión.

Asumo el reto de abrirme a lo que la vida disponga, muy a pesar de que en muchos momentos esto pueda ser doloroso y difícil.

Comprendo, acepto que crecer cuesta y por lo tanto me comprometo con mi propio crecimiento y el respeto de tu crecimiento.

Hoy, me comprometo a dejarte libre, a no coartarte con pensamientos, ni acciones, ni energías, ni intenciones. Te observo fluir libre por el camino de la vida, y lo disfruto muy a pesar de mis sensaciones y sentimientos.

Te dejo libre para que puedas morar tu interioridad y desde ahí vayas construyendo tu ser, tu vida, y tu existencia.

Me comprometo a estar siempre a tu lado, para reír, bailar, llorar, cantar, gozar, reflexionar, crecer.

Hoy te ofrendo mi amor desde lo más profundo de mi ser y reafirmo la intención de construir contigo una nueva forma de ser amantes, novias, compañeras.

Quiero continuar este proceso de bañarnos desnudas en la lluvia y purificarnos con los rayos del sol, de la luna y las estrellas.

Quiero danzar contigo dulces melodías que nos envuelvan y nos transformen.

Quiero surcar mares, países, y planetas.

Quiero estar a tu lado en todos tus momentos y todos tus procesos.

Hoy, amada mía, te regalo mi amor y con él, la alegría, la esperanza, la promesa de construir un entorno, una vida diferente.





*Luz in the Universe* by Ana Lilia Salinas



## La brevedad de la materia

*Erika Almenara*

I.

Una puerta negra y en medio un triángulo. Un sueño compacto de comienzos inocentes. Ahí estabas, sosegada y distinta. ¿Es a mí, me pregunté? Y cuando tus dedos resolvieron el destino del aire, supe que era a mí a quien observabas.

Desde ese instante no me despegué de ti. Estuvieras o no, no me despegué de ti.

Tus viajes, los feriados, nuestro insomnio, nada importaba porque aquella noche tú y yo formamos un yugo. Formamos un yugo y no me despegué de ti ya nunca.

II.

Se acabaron los *nos vemos mañana*,  
se acabaron,  
no sé yo hasta cuándo

adiós,  
por ahora,  
gata ingenua  
que  
ya no ronronea  
pues se hace llamar alma vieja

adiós,  
a tu caminar en celo,  
a mis ojos en tu pantalón.

al preciso abandono hacia el verde papel.

III.

Entre el decorado de mis dedos,  
descubro tu olor,  
y recuerdo  
mi cuerpo reflejado en el tuyo,  
quito  
pongo,  
sigo sin ti.

IV.

Entonces, me puse de pie  
abrí la libreta  
y  
anoté Poesía (o tu nombre) tres veces

pensé,  
¿a dónde quedo yo,  
y  
las noches que soñé contigo,  
que me toqué para ti?

¿a dónde van mis frases entre líneas cuando estuve lejos?,  
¿a dónde quedo yo  
que  
siempre traigo prisa?

V.

Observo faroles,  
tras ellos,  
el color celeste  
los ampara

observo su circularidad  
que  
minutos después,  
son tus senos  
los que nunca podré acariciar,  
porque a mí todavía me falta  
y tú  
ya tienes demasiado.

## VI.

Tras los despistes de mi soledad  
sosegada,  
comenzó a llamarme  
yo  
sin detener mi caminar  
avancé hacia ella  
la miré en silencio  
aunque mi mente no callaba  
para cuando estiró su mano  
el puño de su ruego me derribó.

## VII.

¿Para qué?  
si yo no creo en uniones y tú ya tienes una,  
si a tus pecas no las cuento yo,  
si tus labios no se pintan de rojo para mí,  
si mis dedos no huelen a tu sexo.

## VIII.

Solamente hoy voy a pensar en ti,  
sólo hoy,  
me dejaré vencer  
y  
me atraparé ese sueño  
grito que en mi pecho se encoge  
  
sólo hoy  
serás un pequeño luto,  
un aborto  
inducido desde mi propia muerte.

## IX.

En verde te preferí,  
cuando  
por tus campos,  
me dejabas pastorear la realidad,  
verde papel  
siempre aleteando.

X.

Hoy condeno a la familia,  
porque entre sus normas  
se me ha podrido un amor

condeno sus secuaces sombras,  
que,  
acapanan al individuo,  
implantándolo  
entre los recodos  
del conformismo

hoy condeno  
la puntualidad  
de sus decisiones  
porque se me ha podrido un amor,  
un amor,  
desde sus entrañas.

XI.

Te habla

no

a

la

que

has

dejado

en

pausa

te habla

la de la silla

la que ahora

desnuda

frente al espejo

cubre retazos

que

a través de aguja e hilo

ha unido.

XII.

Llevas el color del cerro  
y tus ojos son  
como estrellas caídas  
derramadas sobre tierra

eres como el diseño  
que salvó civilizaciones  
y nos hizo hombres.

XIII.

Demonio te llamo,  
demonio mío,  
parido  
yo te elijo  
y te nombro  
más en la nube purpúrea  
te alejo.

XIV.

Esto es el pecado  
así cuenta la verdadera leyenda,  
el mismo infierno al mirar tu pupila,  
al descubrir tus dedos,  
pretender tu mano

así cuenta la verdadera leyenda,  
y esto es el pecado  
tus piernas juntas  
el pecho liso  
bendecido para el ataque  
y yo  
sin estar  
sin entrar en él.

XV.

Amaneceres irreconocibles  
la niebla incrustada entre ceja y ceja



temblores,  
antiguos y olvidados temblores

frases que golpean la memoria arrinconando al sueño,  
sensaciones que se repiten

lunes que abandonan la felicidad  
un otoño que no sólo para mí dejó de brillar  
alguien sabe  
un sueño indebido.

XVI.

Sus ojos  
despertaron a las flores

hizo círculos en el agua  
paralizó la pesadilla,  
dijo mi nombre.

XVII.

Errante, entre las matas descubres una mujer lavando su cuerpo, dónde sino a la orilla. Acercarte quisieras mas sabes, que el cabello que enrosca, que los dedos que dobla, orientados están y tú, tú solo observas sin quejidos, sin turbulencias de ningún tipo.

XVIII.

A estas alturas de tu vida  
detente y mira  
el reflejo en el mar  
repasa el costo,  
la aventura  
y siéntate

que  
vamos a hablar  
de ti,  
conocida mía

sobre el manantial,  
sobre su Ebro

ese que otorgas  
enardecida,  
conocida mía  
ese que otorgas.



## Te extraño

*Soad Grayeb*

Te extraño por las noches  
cuando entrabas a mi casa  
cual si fueras un ladrón  
a robarme el corazón.

A robarme la calma  
de señora tranquila,  
y despertar en mí  
pasiones dormidas.

A soñar entre tus brazos  
las mieles de las noches  
del amor desbordado,  
la ternura vivida, el cariño soñado.

Y descubrir entre tu piel,  
tu olor y tu placer  
el amor más intenso.

Y poco a poco dejarme llevar  
en un vaivén de caricias  
en el compás de tu música  
a lo subliminal.

Y quedarme dormida,  
sintiendo tú abrazo en mi cintura.  
con tranquilidad  
y ternura.

agosto 1995



*The Bath by Anna-Marie López*

## Romanza del amor raro

*Odette Alonso*

Ella nunca fue mía  
antes fue de su madre y sus amigas  
antes fue de la patria y esas lejanas tierras exquisitas.  
Inventó otros amores    fue feliz  
compartiendo el rumor pausado de otras lenguas.  
Entonces  
tampoco ella era mía  
era de la aventura cercana de la muerte.  
Ella nunca fue mía y sin embargo  
yo no tuve insistencia más rara que su amor.  
Porque arqueaba su espalda y yo resplandecía  
me tragaba su lengua    dentelleaba.  
En las tardes ardientes aún sueño nuestros cuerpos  
el humo del cigarro  
el rocío final  
y entonces sé que ella fue mía a su manera  
y eso basta.

## Melancolía

*María Amparo Jiménez*

Me sumo en profunda melancolía

Al saber que...

Ni hoy,

Ni nunca

Serás mía.

¡Lo que yo daría

Por tenerte un segundo!

Miento... Te tuve...

Me he recreado en tu mirada.

Recorrí tus anhelos y recuerdos horas enteras.

Compartiendo tus senderos

Resonando en tus palabras

En tus silencios

De no ser así,

Esta melancolía

Que habita mi vida

No sería tan mía

.... y tan tuya.



## ¡Quisiera estar allí!

*María Ysabel*

Allí donde me necesitas y donde estén tus carencias,  
Allí donde esté tu alegría y también tu regocijo,  
Allí donde alguien más que tú pueda habitar en paz y armonía,  
Allí cerquita, pegadita, justo a tu lado, ni mas atrás ni mas adelante,  
Allí como adosada a tu corazón, Allí quiero encontrar mi alegría.

19 mayo 2003

\*\*\*\*\*

## Verte

*Artemisa Téllez*

Verte  
    es sentirme  
        a tu disposición  
Es deshacerme  
    volverme azúcar  
        soluble solamente  
        en tu esencia  
        de mujer y de lesbiana  
Es ser todo  
    y no ser nada  
Es odiarte  
porque teniéndome así  
        no haces de mí  
            lo que te da la  
                gana...

## Blanqui

*Mónica M. Rivera Colón*

Tú y solo tú...

Tú eres el motivo  
de esta callada tristeza  
vestida de alegría.

De la ansiedad  
disfrazada de sosiego.  
De la inseguridad  
pintada de dominio.  
De mi silencio  
ensordeciendo cada húmedo pensar.  
Del aparente dominio  
sobre estas ansias locas.

Tú eres la causa  
de la mirada perdida  
buscándote en cada rincón.  
Del desvelo constante  
de mi corazón.  
De esta incontrolable necesidad  
en represión.

Tú, amor mío,  
eres la razón  
de este canto nostálgico  
al viento.

Tú, que me llevas  
hasta el cielo  
para después soltarme  
al vacío desolador  
que produce tu ausencia.

Tú, dueña,  
entras descalza  
a los sederos de mi alma.

Tu aroma penetrante  
abarca ese inmenso espacio  
que solo ocupa mi soledad.

Tú, solo tú, amada,  
floreces en cada centímetro  
de piel lacerada.  
Me cubres de besos, regalas caricias,  
me brindas alegría, paz, sosiego.

En ti descubro  
la perfección que antes creí  
inexistente  
y comprendo pasmada:

que eres tú quien en otoño  
desprende de los árboles  
las hojas secas;  
que es tu mano  
quien limpia de manchas la luna  
y hace resplandecer  
cada estrella del firmamento.

Es por ti que florecen  
las rosas en primavera  
y para ti es el canto  
de las aves enamoradas.

Eres tú, y nadie más  
quien esconde el sol los atardeceres  
y lo despiertas de madrugada  
para que el horizonte pinte.

Eres tú,  
¿cómo no lo supe antes?,  
quien desviste la oruga  
para hacerla mariposa.

quien el torrente espumoso del río  
 lleva hasta el mar,  
 quien pinta de arco iris  
 el cielo cansado de llorar.

Todo,  
 todo en ti,  
 por ti,  
 para ti.

Tú eres la causa  
 de todo lo que me rodea,  
 de todo lo que  
 a este cuerpo alegre  
 en su infinita nostalgia.

Estas siempre conmigo,  
 dentro, fuera circundante.  
 En mi soledad, me llenas toda.  
 En mi tristeza, riegas alegría.  
 En mi llanto, flores frescas.  
 En mi desesperación, sosiego.  
 En mi ardiente necesidad,  
 soplas el viento en mi oído...

Y me enamoras  
 con cada paso  
 que te acercas alejándote,  
 con cada prófuga caricia  
 que ya lejos no se pierde de mi piel.

Es tuya la culpa  
 de mis ansias inmortales  
 de esta resonancia de tu voz  
 en cada rincón de mi ser.

Tú, quien cubrió de llamas  
 esta helada piel moribunda.

Tú,  
 tienes la culpa  
 de hacerme amarte

tan ciega y sorda  
 tan entregada y llena.

Tú llena,  
 me llenas de ti.  
 Tú viva, latente,  
 real en mis pensamientos.

Paseándome el cuerpo,  
 reventándome las venas

Tú en mí, siempre en mí.

enero 2007

## En esta eternidad

*Milka Ramírez*

Quédate aquí conmigo...  
En este momento...  
En esta eternidad,  
Por que no quiero despertar,  
El tiempo...

Aquí

Con tus labios en los míos,  
Derramando nuestra humedad  
Y tomando de tu dulce miel,  
Nadando en tu océano,  
Hasta el mismo cielo.

Sí....

Quédate aquí conmigo,  
Con tu pecho sobre el mío,  
Bailando este bolero de amor,  
Comiendo de tu fruta mordida...  
Hasta alimentar a mi aliento.

Ven....

Quédate  
Aquí  
Conmigo.

Para fundirme en tu interior,  
Para someterme a tu piel,  
Hasta inhalar el aroma de tu sexo,  
Y encontrar tu sendero secreto.

Ven...

Quédate aquí conmigo  
En este momento,  
En esta eternidad....

Porque  
No  
Quiero  
Despertar...  
El  
Tiempo.

## **When Two Angels Love Each Other** **Esperanza y Angélica**

*Nancy Lorenza Green*

It happened unexpectedly.  
Their eyes met and love filled the air.  
They expressed their desire without words.  
Their hearts filled with joy.  
The first time they touched,  
it was with a soft and unexpected passion.  
They opened their wings cautiously;  
blended their souls in a tender embrace.  
Startled by fear, they hid their faces.  
But when they looked up to the heavens, their eyes met  
and their lips joined in a soft, passionate, eternal kiss.  
Cuddled among the clouds, they chose not to separate.  
They looked at each other tenderly  
and found love deep in their souls.

August 2004



## ¡Guerrillera, Tortillera Estyle!

*Mayra Lazara Dole*

Charo, my deer seester in Cuba,

As usual, I writes joo in good Ingli so joo can practees for gwhen joo come live wiss us in Meeami.

Dis morning, I wake up wiss a twisted bun becos las nigh, I drag Paca by dee joo know what to a Babalao – dats dee only gway dee bubble-brain will come wiss me. ¡Dee session turn out to be a rice and mango estew! Gwen dee big lesbo, Babalao Lázara, tell me, “I has to pass a dead cheeken over joor naked body to get rid of evil espirits.” Paca grab her by dee collar and escreamed, “¡Nobody toches my gwoman bot me!”

Ay, Charo. I had to get Paca outta der quick. ¡She woulda ponch Babalao Lázara in dee cocotrina and leave her disguanbabulated!

Bueno, I talks about somesing nice now.

Gwhen joo see joor niece, Chichi, joo won’t belief joor ice. Paca gwanted to estick her in balay classes so she loose gwait. Poor baby. Paca doesn’t let La Chichi eat Papallón or Pisa Ho no more. Dis gweek, she has her on a gringa Quacker diet for breakfast and tofu wiss bird seeds for deenner. ¡My soul be breakin in half! Gwat kinda foot is dat for a growing girl, Charo? ¡La Chichi needs real meat, condensed milk, sugar, butter and *cafecitos* to grow into a gwoman wiss beautiful curbs, like me!

I can barely gwait till I tell joo gwhat I has planned to do wiss Paca. Pero first, dis...

Las nigh, gwhen gwee came home from Paco’s and his gwife Albertina’s house (Paco is Paca’s twin brodder) – La Chichi, who be only six bot came out dramática like Paca, tells os, “¡I be dying of hunger!” She shuffle her feets around dee house wiss wobbly knees and a hand over her forehead. “I is gonna faint from estarvación.”

Paca feel no pity. She gwants Chichita to get eskeeney and look like a boy so nobody look at her gwhen she grow up into a gwoman. But joo know me. Hidden from Paca, I lets La Chichi nibble cheeps, cake, hotdó and *merenguitos*.

Paca say dat me and La Chichi are inflated. ¡Gwhat happen is dat Paca dee pain has a square mouse and she no eat noting! She be eskinny like a pin and gwants os thin, like las Americanas anoréxicas. ¡No gway, Olé!

I love my sexy guitar curbs and if she no like dem, I go out to find tortilleras who do.

¡Oh, my deer seester! La Chichi is dee leg of dee devil, *y cuando le combiene*, she be a sweet bread dreeping in honey. I be so glad Paca talk me into doing artificial inseminación. ¡I don’t know gwhat I’d do wissout my

Chichita!

La Chichi gwas monkey cute until two months ago when Paca cut her hair dat gwas down to her waist. I get home carrying bird foot – joo know, esprouts and sheets Paca makes os eat – and Paca say to me, “So sorry, Milagros. My hand esleeped and I chop off Chichi’s hair by mistake.”

¡Niña! ¡I howl and cry like a wolf! ¡Joo could hear my escreams een Cuba!

La Chichi now have berry short hair, like Paca, and she look like a chonky Tonboy. Soddently, she no gwants me to put peenk ribbons on her hair no more. ¡She rrips them awt and booms, “¡I gwant to be a boy!”

¡If I don’t do ghwat I need to do today about Paca, La Chichi gwill one day grow op to be a trannyboi and it gwill kill me of a *patatú!*

¡*Santísimo Sacramento*, Charo! Paca’s plan has always been to make Chichita into a B-O-I. ¿Gwhat is dis gworld coming to? ¿One day our datters’ children gwill be gwalking dee estreets naked and having sex wiss trees and we’s gonna have to accept it?

¡*De’so ná, moná!*

¡Ay, Charo! Paca’s obsession of being a sepeartist dyke who makes os go to dee Meechigan Gweemen’s Music Festival has drove me loca. She estill gwants me to call myself a “wombyn,” and read dat crazy journal, “Seenister Gwisdom.” ¡Dat gringa craziness is gwat be making our Chichi rebel and gwant to turn into a boy! I is gonna take control today so La Chichi becomes a feminine-looking lesbiana, like me. ¡Gwhen she grow up, she gonna estand tall and call herself a *tortillera* or I gwill have a *sirimba!*

Mi hermana, Paca estopped letting me go to gwork. She has me tied at home cleaning, cooking, and gwashing clothes wiss Fá like a crazy gwoman. Gwhat a degenerada bootch. After La Katrina and La Gwilma, dee roof of dee eficiensi never estopped *liquiando*. Drops fall on my head *pleep-pleep-plop*, all day long. I espend too moch tine mopping dee floor. Dee owner of dee eficiensi is more cheap dan Paca! Gwhat bad lock I has, chica! ¡Alls I do is mop! Dis is no life and I is gonna do somesing about it today.

Before I tells joo gwat I’s about to do, I tells joo dis...

¿Paca be tinkin she be hot sheet, joo know? She’s become berry Americanisá wiss her pantalones of corduroi, botas de cowboy and elegant undergwears from Gwalgreens. She espend every day after gworking constrochión in front of dee mirror, broshing her crew cot, chaving her face, and using after chaiv dat esmells like lightning. Gwhen La Chichi estays at her uncle Paco’s house, Paca asks me to wear a plantain in my pants to go awt so men don’t look at me. ¡Ay, *Santa Barbara!*

Charo, mi hermanita, Paca dee WOMBYN trockdriver has me and La Chichi wissout new clothes. She refuses to buy os dresses. Dee dancing eskleton espend weekends at Targe, a loxury estore, buying men’s clothes for herself. ¡Pero for me and La Chichi, Nánanina!

Paca did buy me an '88 black pick-up truck – I wanted a new, peenk Bosgwagon. Bot dat is all. She never estops telling me, “¡Take care of it cos it be an anteek and it cost me an eye of thee face!” Ghwen I ask for gasoleen moneys, she complains, “¡Milagros, joo is more expensive den a dummy daughter raised in Francia!” ¡Le zumba el Mango!

¡Le traqueta el Merequetengue, chica!

¡Look, dee turkey won't even buy me a mini-eskirt to make her *caliente*, like me used to! Dee bra I has on wiss safety pins be dee gwan I bring from Cuba. ¿Be it fair, Charo, dat she gwants me to burn my bras, become a bool dyke, and not dress feminine no more becos she's become a jelose paranóica? She even tells me I has to part my hair on dee rye, not dee lef, becos dee rye be sign of a married gwoman. ¡I tink she be going coconuts!

Ay, Charo. Ass joo can imagine, I has been having *tembleques*. *Tengo los nervios de punta* from hiding to make La Chichi dresses for eschool from tings I find, like old curtains and ripped materials from dee year of dee Nana. I espent a lot of time sewing, day and night, so La Chichi go pretty to eschool. ¡Dee littol dresses of curtains I makes her look beautiful! Bot, eet break my soul gwhen Chichita throws *perretas*. She cries, “¡I ain't no girl! I hate dresses! ¡I gwant to wear pants and soospenders like Paco and Paca!

¡I puts my foots down and never lets her get agway wiss dat locura! Lockily, Paca dee loca macho bootch leaves to gwork at fie in dee morning. ¡She never see La Chichi dress in eskirts and ribbons on her bangs or she will grow breasts from *el espanto*!

Charo, I knew I has to do somesing drastic gwhen I estarted not giving two bananas about noting. Dee honest truth is dat I have estopped gwanting to do dee *fuiqui-fuiqui*. I don't even has *ánimo* to cook Paca dee *ajiaquito* soup so delicious, like dee gwan I cook in Cuba. ¿Remember, mi *hermanita*? ¡I used to cook it wiss noting, jost air and gwater, low in salt and everyting. Bot joo knows how I cook: feenger leeckin goot!

Before, gwhen I be madly in love wiss dee big disco dyke and she apreechiated my volopchuous gwan-hondred-and-sixty pound curby body, I see Paca as handsome and virile, even if she be pale-white and eskeeney like a lizard. Now, I only sees her big buck teeth, bow legs, cross eye, and ears dat estick awt like a bat. ¡In dee middle of dee nigh, she be looking more and more like a bony rat!

Dat's why I know I has to do somesing....

Today, as a final farewell, I cooked *congrí* for Paca's bootch friends and left it on dee range. They always come to jam wiss *congas* and *timbales* on Friday nights. Dee *cabrones* all be married bot wiss girlfriends on dee sigh. ¡Ay, how I wish I coulda sent them to fry sheets in hell! I wish I woulda eslapped clean deir hootchi momma eskeeney girlfriends who be ogly like dee *cucaracha y el cocodrilo*. Bot no. Looking back, I be glad I always estayed *calmá* and not give nobody dee evil eye becos Paca could lose dee opportunity

to be a famous *millionaria*.

Joo heard right. ¡Paca's band, "Meeami Cuban Power" ees dee beegest ting in dee gworld! La Glorita and her hosband, El Estevan, are going to contract dem. Dey even came out in dee Meeami Herald and dee Nuevo Herald! Next Gweek, Paca's band is going to be interviewed on dee Elen Degenerate and dee Opra chow. I gwill dress op extra pretty. Joo never know. Gail, de gwoman I has a crosch on and Opra's best friend – wink, wink – likes gorditas. She may look my gway, if joo know what I mean. Bot even if she be berry cute, joo know me, I could never do noting like dat. First, Paca and me would has to break op.

Now I has to tell joo dee truth about a secret....

Since Paca estarted forcing me to gwear pants and T-shirts and she made me cots my hairs berry chort, I has developed crosches on leepstick lesbos. Today, I bozzed my hairs, put on men's pants, and estoffed a plantain inside my men's undergwear. I eslid on my boots, too. ¡I felt so powerful I almose estarted picking op gwemen, *a lo guerrillera, tortillera* estyle! Pero I has to gwait till tomorrow for dat.... Joo know I is berry moral and I don't do noting behind nobody's back.

Paca kept promising that gwan day gwee would live dee Amerrican Dream. She'd say, "We's gonna be *millonarias*, Milagros." ¡Yeah! ¡Wiss mucho dinero bot me and La Chichita in dee old pick-op trock, wiss crew cots, dressed like hobo bootches!

I be tired of Paca, Charo, so I has packed my tings and am ready to go. I found an *apartmentico* in Littol Habana for La Chichi and me. That is dee news I saved for last.

Don't gworry about me. ¡I BE FREE and gwill be me! I gwill be fine. ¡I Gwill Survive!

Mi *hermanita*, I has to dress better to go pick up La Chichi at eschool. After dat, we goes to Sebenileben so la *niña* can eat all she gwants wissout having to hide from Paca and die of malnutrichión. After dat, I goes apply for my old job at Littol Habana Café and try to *ligarme* a delicious femmy gwoman I never pays attention to gwhen I gwas a fembo.

Gwhat a great life la Chichi and I is gonna have. ¡I can't gwait till joo come lives wiss os!

*Bueno*, Charito, I loves joo wiss all my heart, mi *hermanita*. I be glad joo be practicing joor Ingli wiss my letters. Gwhen Paca become famous, unless we break op and Gail and me hook op – wink, wink – we be headed there in a yacht to bring joo here wiss os! I is dying to see joo. ¡Please writes me berry soon!

Many hogs and keeses,

Tu hermana que te adora and never forgets joo,

Milagros Melancolía.



## El primer amor

*Renée (Stephens) Araña*

I can't really say the first time we met. It must have been at least 1975 if not sooner. She knew she had to be nice to me because my mom was the noon duty aid/lunch time patrol at our elementary school. We were in Brownies and Girls Scouts together. We met during catechism, the only public school brown girls at the catholic school prepping for our holy first communion. Sister Eva, the now obvious dyke, was always annoyed with us for all the giggling we did. I couldn't help it. Lisa Marie, the long lost Mexican daughter of Elvis Presley always made me laugh, even then. We made our first communion surviving a whole year of afternoon Catholicism shoved down our throats. A few years later, I was excited by her presence across the aisle, when her family arrived at the same mass as mine. My brother scolded me for trying to talk to her non-verbally (gesturing to her across the aisle). "But she's my friend," I tell him.

In fourth grade she made me laugh so hard at lunch that orange juice came out of my nose. We had an ongoing joke for years of that day I cried orange juice tears. She asked me on a date then, in the morning on a Friday. "Don't make any plans after school I have a surprise." So all day I ask, "What's my surprise? What's my surprise?" We walk home together and arrive at the local bakery. A cream puff. She treats me to a cream puff. I remember a man approached us speaking in Spanish. I stood frozen, my days of speaking the Spanish language almost completely gone after years of speech therapy forced on me since 2nd grade. I was glad she could help him. I knew she was a good person, even then.

In fifth grade, she pulled on my bra strap and it hurt. I still hate wearing bras. She taught me how to complete the perfect lay-up in basketball. We'd play for hours in my backyard, just down the street from her apartment complex. Her family on the south side of Bailey Avenue, my family two blocks northwest. I remember her tenth-year birthday slumber party, all us girls in her father's Pinto. I clearly remember being shy yet wanting to sleep next to her. We didn't have a name for it then or think it was wrong...we just liked being near each other. We went to Great America Amusement Park with Girl Scouts; that was one long fun unforgettable day.

My mother loved her manners and Lisa made her laugh too. Still she tried to keep our distance because Lisa was a tomboy with dark skin, dark eyes and jet black indigenous hair. It didn't keep us from being friends though. Nothing could. In 6<sup>th</sup> grade I'd play sports with her at school just not after school because my mother wouldn't let me. "That's for boys," she'd say. We have pictures of us in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades. Looking at those photos now, I see the young femme with her butch. We were even closer in junior high. We were in a

peer-counseling group that met weekly with an adult advisor. There's a picture of our 7<sup>th</sup> grade volleyball team. As the scorekeeper in my pink velour shirt, I am laying in front of her, our bodies close. According to my slam book in 8<sup>th</sup> grade she was my best friend.

We ended up at rival high schools because her apartment complex was on the south side of Bailey, my house, north. When she was crowned homecoming queen my mother saved the newspaper article and asked me, "Whatever happened to her?" When she was in the *San Jose Mercury* newspaper for being an outstanding softball player, again my mother saved the article. I still have the original from 1986. It wasn't until 1994 that I finally tracked her down. I had finished my BA degree and was moving out of state for graduate school so I just had to see her.

When I came out at age 23, I wrote a story about her. I had wondered if she too was a lesbiana based on a conversation she and I had in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I thought deep, deep down, were there other mujeres besides her? After obtaining my Masters, I swore I'd never marry someone without a college degree. My mother assumed I would marry a man, a white man like her. Who knew that in the year 2004, we would be in SF City Hall exchanging vows in front of a bunch of strangers because nobody knew how long these marriages would be permitted.

Last month I saw Mayor Gavin Newsom and was able to finally thank him directly. When he heard our story he touched his heart. Our everyday lesbian life is activism. I am third generation to be married in SF and when I told my father, the first thing he said was, "What will the family think?" Shortly after, I found out just how "the family" thought. There's nothing in-between, they either love what we did or don't acknowledge it at all. The "don't ask don't tell policy" exists in our families too. It's not enough to them that she was always my first love or that I have known her longer than any siblings have known their spouses. Not many people, especially queers, can say they have known each other for over 32 years. She's everything I said I wouldn't marry. She monogamous, doesn't smoke, barely drinks and just went back to school to finish her degree at age 39.

It took us over ten years of never directly acknowledged dates in our late 20s and early 30s. I didn't know she was out until 1999 when the ex and I saw her in SF's Castro district. My ex told me, "Hey, isn't that the one you wrote that story about?" After having drinks with us that night, the ex proclaimed that I was going to marry her someday. I was all irritated. "What? That Lisa Marie is a suburbanite and loves to play golf! No way!" Yet, I wrote "amigas por vida" on a photo of the two of us. Who knew how symbolic that photo would become? Now those differences allow us to move in different dyke worlds. The white Diana Shore types and their golf tournaments during the day to the urban White Horse girl bar in Oakland later that night. We are very blessed, even though everyday is still very hard. We fight over race issues;



my mixed white, Mexican and Portuguese family is too whitewashed for her/our liking. We fight over economic class issues. My materialist middle class siblings who are less accepting because of the corruption of Catholicism get on my last nerve. Less than a week after we married in City Hall we went to my niece's first communion at the same church where we had made ours. It was all too closely related but luckily, there were no lightning bolts when we entered.

## My Twisted Similes

*Martiza Nazario*

Sliding against your icy body  
I fight to control my urge to be one with you.  
Your body feels as expensive as new drywall  
for one who just lost his house,  
while my body feels as cheap as my horny dreams  
about you.  
I feel as lonely as someone with a gun to their head.  
I pray like a person without a home to go to,  
but you continue to ignore my feelings.  
You stand as angular as a priest in confession  
questioning my motives and desires.  
My inner thoughts scream, warning me, begging me  
to run away;  
they speak as loud as abortion speaks  
to the penniless woman with five mouths to feed.  
I hear them, but pretend they are not talking to me,  
but they grow like the morning sun,  
they creep up like vomit from a sick stomach.  
Tomorrow I'll try to listen...  
I'll try running like the clouds in the sky,  
I'll try to be as mad as my father's old belt,  
I'll be as eager to leave this relationship  
as a puppy dog in training.  
But today...today I remain as reliable  
as the voices in my head.

May 18, 2007

## Bella ilusión que fugaz

*Luz María (Luzma) Umpierre*

Miro tu tumba llena de matorros salvajes  
y quiero estirarme sobre tus huesos largos  
y besar cada cuenca vacía  
y pretender que esa grama es tu pubis.

Quiero sacarte a pasear por estas calles,  
Sylvia,  
quiero que huelas el olor gasolinero en el aire,  
premonición tuya no entendida por otros.  
Quiero que veas las filas para ver al siquiatra,  
los jóvenes suicidas,  
las mujeres que dejan leche  
a sus niños mientras duermen;  
madres abandonadas,  
madres sin elección,  
madres vacías  
que hilan otro tipo de gas  
todos los días sin saber  
que tú les señalaste el camino.

Quiero que camines de mi brazo  
y hagas sonar tu voz entre la cal  
del esqueleto  
y susurres en mi oído  
que quieres acostarte  
en la playa, bajo el sol en Cape Cod,  
y que te haga el amor allí en Provincetown  
pueblo de poder ultravioleta  
en donde pensaron una vez  
    encerrarte  
y a donde regresas hoy,  
    riendo, a mi lado,  
    a ver barcasas y  
    ballenas.

Es febrero otra vez, Sylvia.  
Por ahora, no hay hielo;  
las estampillas han subido  
de precio y tienen otra imagen grabada  
pero aún pueden comprarse en medio de la noche  
por poetas noctámbulas  
para enviar sus rimas a casa  
de la madre.

Ven, ven, coje mi brazo.  
Yo también vuelvo este febrero  
desde lejos,  
Hagamos el amor en esta orilla  
y que las olas revierten y penetren,  
cal y sal,  
olas que desde lejos  
nos envía una isla.

Miro tu tumba  
y quiero estirarme  
...y beso  
    y pretendo  
    y la sal  
    y la cal  
    llenan mi boca  
    y sé, Sylvia  
    que esta noche  
    de este febrero menos frío  
    yo te quiero.

## One Miraculous Day

*Nicole Marie López*

Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
A bottle of pills to swallow  
One last breathe to take before the noose is tied  
The last cut made on those tender wrists  
Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One more youth commits suicide

She walks the streets  
Alone  
Clothes moth eaten & worn out  
Shoes are torn  
Strugglin' to find herself  
Strugglin' to love herself  
In her world,  
Where faith falls apart  
Hope drowns in an ocean of misery,  
And the feelings of belonging  
Are only mere fantasy  
Her bed is the scrapping  
Of cardboard she pieces together  
Or the cold metal  
Of parkside benches  
And fuck having a blanket  
To protect her from the cold  
She tries to stay warm by  
Hands rubbing together  
Arms enclosed  
And the slow steady beat of her rocking body  
To her;  
Hunger & Thirst  
Are everyday familiar feelings  
As she sells her body for sex work.  
It's survival  
To get her next meal  
She is continuously  
Haunted by the monstrous images  
Of that one slap  
The yells  
"God hates people like you"  
"Get the hell out of my house"  
"You are not my daughter"

She cried out  
But no one listened  
So, she walks the streets  
Alone

Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One bottle of pills to swallow  
One last breathe to take before the noose is tied  
One last cut made on those tender wrists  
Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One more youth commits suicide

You see him everyday on the train  
You know who he is  
The one who sits  
In the last corner seat  
Dark circles under his eyes  
Hasn't slept for days  
Because he is consumed by fear  
Because of the violence and abuse  
His fragile body has been subjected to  
For just being who he is  
His memories are tainted  
By the remembrance  
Of a time when the hands  
Of his very own father  
Took the metal baseball bat  
And beat him. Beat Him. Beat Him.  
His own son  
"Fucking Faggot"  
"Fucking Queer"  
"You're not my son"  
So you see him everyday on the train  
You know who he is  
The one who jumps from car to car  
Seeking refuge.  
Strugglin' to find himself  
Strugglin' to love himself  
He sits on the last corner seat  
Dark circles under his eyes  
Hasn't slept for days  
Because of fear



Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
 One bottle of pills to swallow  
 One last breathe to take before the noose is tied  
 One last cut made on those tender wrists  
 Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
 One more youth commits suicide

Welcome to His world  
                   Her world  
                   My world  
 This is the type of tribulations  
 That burden my soul  
 That keeps my head  
 Down low, between my legs  
 Like a dog who is embarrassed  
 Because he shit & pissed  
 In a hole  
 All the while in disgust  
 His owner's eyes were watching him

Except in my case  
 I'm the dog they watchin'  
 With eyes of disgust  
 Not cus I shit & pissed  
 But it was due to the fact  
 That I was lockin' lips  
 Not with him  
 But Her.  
 Her. Her.  
 Her who makes me  
 Want to try out that  
 Verb  
 Called Love.

Because when it comes to Her  
 The walls which I tricked myself  
 Into believing were indestructible  
 Come crashing down, like lightning  
 That clashes against the night sky  
 And rain pours  
 Flooding the earth  
 As if heaven gates opened  
 Just for Me and Her.

But emotionally  
I stand naked  
In front of a crowd  
That chooses to gaze and gawk  
While they witness  
How easily  
Her & I  
Fingers interlock  
How we fit together so easily  
As if my entire life was a puzzle  
And she was the piece  
That was missing

They continue to stare  
As if her and I  
Are circus freaks  
Performing tricks  
They had not seen before

I can see their perplexed faces  
As if, Her & I  
Were magicians who  
Somehow performing  
An illusion  
That is impossible.

Is it impossible?  
No one ever questions  
The unconditional love  
From a mother  
Bathed upon her children

Is it impossible?  
No one ever questions  
The bond among a band of brothers  
Who stand in the front line of war

Is it impossible?  
No one ever questions the love  
Found in the very epicenter of a family

So no  
It is not impossible  
That this woman  
Can love unremittingly that woman

To want to look  
Her in the eyes  
And open the windows  
To her soul  
Breathe the air she breathes  
Love every inch of her skin  
Melt in the simplicity  
Of her touch

But because of them  
I struggle to find myself  
To love myself...

Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One bottle of pills to swallow  
One last breath to take before the noose is tied  
One last cut made on those tender wrists  
Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One more Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender youth commits suicide  
As reported by the National Runaway Switchboard

How much longer  
Will this nation  
Allow a coast-to-coast  
Hatred front against them persist

How much longer  
Will this nation  
Strip them away of  
Their pride, their dignity  
Their life, liberty and pursuit of happiness

How much longer  
Will this nation allow  
Those who commit crimes of hate  
Those who try to silence  
Their voices & deny  
Them of their existence

How much longer  
Will it take  
Before You  
Open your eyes  
Take off your mask of ignorance

And see that She  
                  Him  
                  Me

Are human  
That we are not a disease  
Not the main cause of  
AIDS & HIV

That the more you push us away  
We come back so much stronger

We are proud  
Adventurous  
Beautiful

We are the epitome of Life.  
We are the epitome of Love.  
We are GLBTQ Youth.

Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One bottle of pills placed back in the cupboard  
One more breath taken of life  
One more scar healed  
Every 5 hours 48 minutes  
One more life saved.  
Is it so much to dream?

June 6, 2007

## María

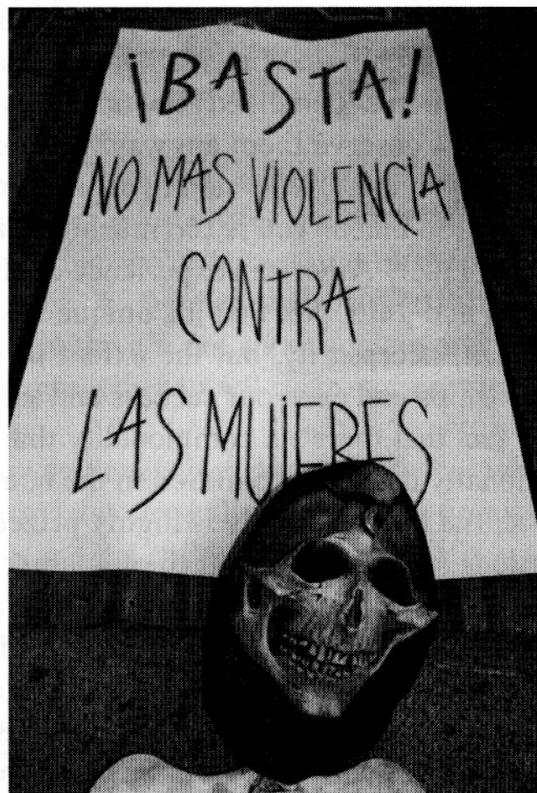
*Mercedes Alba*

María, fue arestada por delitos contra la salud, aunque no sabe leer ni escribir, firmó un papel donde declara haber robado y asesinado a un desconocido. La policía judicial la trasladó a un calabozo sin ventanas, donde le daban agua con petróleo, golpes, ahí la violaron como a la mujer anterior, como la siguiente, dijo que aceptó cuando ya no podía respirar, le dieron 30 años de prisión, dicen que tal vez, era de Oaxaca, Guerrero o de Michoacán.

## En Tijuana

*Mercedes Alba*

En el departamento de inmigración de Tijuana me patearon la cabeza, me perdieron el rostro, se me olvidó mi edad, se rieron de mi vestido nuevo, quedé fichada con el nombre de mi abuela, me esposaron igual que a un criminal de guerra.



*Cruces por Rotmi Enciso*

## The Microcosm of a Culture of Domination and Oppression

*Lucy Marrero*

I can't count the number of times that I've hesitatingly shared a secret fear, longing, insecurity, or crazy behavior that I'd long been consumed with shame over only to find out that I'm by far not the only one. I get responses of, "Oh, my god!" and "Me too!" instead of the looks of shock and horror and whispered, "That girl really needs help," that I expected.

It seems that much of the craziness that rattles around my head or plagues my interpersonal relationships isn't all that unique. In fact, it's *so* not unique that therapists can readily attest that whatever crazy belief or behavior I held was quite common.

Turns out, they're coping mechanisms.

My tendency to freeze under pressure – not being able to even squeak out a response to the condescending, sexist asshole of a boss.

My anxiety in expressing my needs to lovers and friends, preferring to just swallow my disappointments and settle for whatever comes my way.

My tendency to pick romantic partners with a different level of commitment or affection so that we're in a constant push-pull, me chasing them, then they chasing me until finally we're worn down and end it all.

My agonizing anxiety at not getting a response immediately, whether by email, text message, phone call, or, "Let's talk about it later."

My response to rejection or perceived rejection being a litany of put-downs about myself: "You don't deserve them anyway." "What an asshole you are!" "You're so dumb for even trying." "Why don't you just give up and admit you're a fuck-up." "You need too much. You're too much for anyone to love."

It seems to be a uniquely American experience of childhood – the amount of internalized shame and guilt. Not that it's unique in its effect on children's developing self-esteem, necessarily, but the extent to which it impedes our interpersonal relationships and even our success and satisfaction in life.

I can't help but feel that there's a commonality that makes this culture of silencing and emotionally damaging children in the household possible.

In white culture, the nuclear family is highly prized. A two-parent home is the ideal, and little is said about the worth of a larger family: grandparents, godparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends of the family. In a society that prizes individualism, the next logical social unit is the nuclear family. The problem is, the nuclear family has never really been good for women or for children. Women in nuclear families are isolated from their network of support by their husbands. Husbands who have been taught to go forth and inherit the



earth, dominate it, and make it their bitch. Dominating fathers, downtrodden mothers, and children who bear the brunt of it all are the least able to defend themselves and the most vulnerable.

The check-and-balance of social communities is gone in an individualistic society. Men who beat their wives aren't chastised by the community: "It's not our business what goes on in their home." Children who are neglected or mistreated aren't given the much-needed affection of their extended family and community.

It went along smashingly for a bit, back when women knew they wouldn't be heard and children who were raped knew better than to speak out.

Unfortunately, women and children started to figure out how to make their voices heard, although sometimes it took them 20 years to do it.

Freed African slaves, frustrated and dislocated Indians, Chinese railroad workers, migrant Latino farmers, single voices that could be silenced joined together, and the strength of their voices could not be ignored.

Over hundreds of years and millions of dead bodies, their voices rose. The white man fought fiercely, determined not to lose his monopoly of power. He got crafty, perfected the art of double-speak and justification, learned new ways of drowning out the din of the oppressed.

In the meantime, the virus of oppressive hegemony infected the souls of white women and children, men of color, women of color, and babies of color. The white woman looked at her black servant with disgust, believing her overly sexual and incapable of complex emotion. White children absorbed their daddies' hatred and learned to use words as weapons. Babies learned that hair that hangs down and moves in the wind was more beautiful than theirs, and little girls wished for blue eyes while trying to root out the brownness in their skin with bleach.

Hatred of other became hatred of self.

Now emerges the dark underbelly of a culture built on concepts of male and white superiority. What we're witnessing is the retaliatory violence of a perceived loss of power. As women wait longer to have children and get married, children are taught it's not okay for anyone to touch them there, and women of color join together to tell their stories, the preparations for the revolution get underway.

The previously unchallengeable domain of the white male is being challenged. And in the most demasculinizing means possible: by his supposed loyal subjects. His wife and his children scorn him. His hired help clears new paths to equality.

Back when religious deviants from England sought to set up their own version of religious utopia, they did so at a high price. Not only did they commit the atrocious crimes of murder and rape, they had to figure out a way to justify it. If Africans and indigenous people were less than human, then surely they were part of the earth that was given to them by God to subdue and conquer.

And so a culture of violence and justification was born; of seeing a blue sky and being forced to call it green.

Keep that culture of deceit, secrecy, and double-speak long enough, and it seeps into the very fabric of the society, clouding judgment, compromising character. It seeped into the people that whiteness consumed through assimilation. It seeped into the psyches of the women who were at the mercy of their husbands and fathers. It seeped into the souls of the children born to them.

Since the beginning of colonization, white men have fought for control of the land, of the peoples, of the women they raped at night and the subsequent progeny. Everyone else was fighting for legitimization, a voice, a chance, a means of survival without someone's boot constantly on their tired and sweaty necks. Learning violence and coercion as a means of gaining it. Learning to abandon those who would be your ally, those with a similar struggle, to get a few more crumbs from the master's table.

And as the master loses control of his kingdom, he lashes out. He belittles his wife's domestic contributions. He steals into his little girl's room at night to sodomize her. He teaches his sons to subdue and conquer, covertly perhaps, or by brute force if necessary.

It's a war ongoing since the first ship brought to the Western Hemisphere a few pink-faced, greedy bastards. Perhaps only a mutation of the war they'd learned to fight at home. Perhaps the losers of that war – the poor, the illegitimate – could win over here. Perhaps they had a chance to rule the world like the lords and royalty had in their motherlands.

As right and wrong, love and domination blur into an indistinct mess, so our internal compass is compromised. We don't know if we deserve a partner who will hold us when we cry. Perhaps what we need is to suck it up and stop crying. We don't know if we can reject our partner's sexual advances if we would rather not – or act on our strong sexual desires if we would. Perhaps we don't have needs.

When whiteness is the invisible greenhouse that nurtures children into adults, the discrepancies in history are reasoned away. Questions are silenced, childhood instincts about justice demeaned. How can one be raised with a sense of pride and self-worth when everything we've learned is a lie?

How can I, as an adult, form healthy relationships or make wise reproductive choices when from the moment I was born, I was taught that my body was filthy, my choices wrong, that I was worthless without the Lord Our God, that my proper place was in submission to a man?

How could I, as an adult, give voice to the little girl who was pried open and violated, when I took a man into my bed who wanted to penetrate me without a condom; who placated me with lies of sterility? I have been taught that questions are disobedience, challenges evidence of Satan in me.

How long will it take me to recognize my sexual desires and name them?

To set aside the social indoctrination I've long internalized, to step away from engagement rings and marriage and babies – the assumed path of my passage into adulthood?

How will I integrate the brown history that lives in me? Learn of my history and people, their sorrow, their pain, their laughter and joy, and feel a part of them take up residence in me?

I've been taught to be dominated: to be good; to not question; to swallow my needs; accept my weakness; to unquestioningly believe that my boss, my father, my teacher, my husband, my partner knows better than I do; to keep my needs to myself; to value financial success; to see my failures as faults all my own; to judge other women for not being strong or smart or good enough; to cherish my pale skin as if it means something; or to judge other people's inability to be like the white man as indications of their lack of full humanity.

A culture of domination and oppression reenacted itself in my grandfather's bed when I was in it, the hospital bed where they examined me and shoved fingers and equipment inside me in the name of medicine, and in the rooms with closed doors where boys and men wanted to explore my body and conquer it, planting their flag on my flesh. It cleared the path for my marriages and subsequent failures. It justified my partners who couldn't quite grant me full human status, and so used me as an object, not a person. It raised its voice when I discovered the softness of a woman's body and screamed "Depravity! Sin! Filth!" at me.

When we are born with no rights, our boundaries severely violated from infancy, how would we not inherit a deep and abiding sense of shame and worthlessness? We were silenced before we could even speak.

And so some of us finally piece together the truths we've been denied. We spend years scraping off the layers that others painted on us and puzzling out how to build the new structure of ourselves. What do we look like? What foods do we savor? What kind of touch makes our souls sing? What can we rightfully demand of those we would invite into our bodies and hearts?

We fight to find ourselves, the selves we never knew. The authentic selves we concealed under rugs and in basements that did not conform to a narrow definition of good and right and acceptable.

We build our families, finding others who were broken, and marvel at our shared pasts.

We feel our way in the darkness of our history, editing the texts in our heads of where we came from, how we got there, and what it means for us now. We discover the charismatic father was a narcissist, a liar, and a pedophile; and the freedom our nation so cherishes mere propaganda, a cover up for disempowerment, murder, and rape.

We long for our grandmas and our great-grandmas, who could tell us more about ourselves by telling us more about themselves and their stories. We scour obscure texts for traces of our history, piecing together our story. We claw our

way back to the earth of our souls, the land we mourned, the loss of all our lives without even knowing it.

I am revolutionary because I have rejected the path laid out for me. I refuse to follow the script of heterosexuality when my soul rejects it. I will not embrace the whiteness extended to me when my heart tells me where I belong. I will not raise my son to dominate and subdue, silence and inspire fear in women and children. I will yell my story from websites and books and class discussions and late-night talks in my kitchen. I will find my community and I will embrace it. My soul will not be bought, my essence not shackled.



## Rainbow Angels

*Randi M. Romo*

My work often requires meetings in other towns and that's how I came to be in Atlanta just before the Thanksgiving holiday. My plan was to do the meeting and then drive on down to my mom's in Tampa Bay, Florida, to spend the holiday with her and my brothers.

With the meeting behind me I was looking forward to heading on to Florida. Having made this trip many times before alone, I was comfortable with the road ahead; I slipped in my favorite CD and headed out of Atlanta. Emblazoned across the back window and bumper of my Ford following along behind me were my rainbow pride and activist stickers. As an out dyke, I like to remind people that I, too, share this world and to let my queer brothers and sisters know that they are not alone.

It wasn't long though that I realized that my gas gauge was showing low, so I pulled into a station not far outside of Atlanta proper. There was only one car on the back side of the station that I had pulled into; it was a shiny new silver Thunderbird parked at the pump ahead of me. I thought nothing of the deserted car as I set about filling my tank and washing my windshield.

A man came out of the store, crossing the tarmac heading toward the T-Bird. It registered peripherally that he was bald, wearing shorts and combat boots. Moments after he had gotten into the car, loud, nerve wracking heavy metal sounding music blasted from his windows. It was so loud that it made me wince, the bass literally pounding in my chest.

Then the guy got out of the Thunderbird and leaving the stereo blasting he went back into the store. Again, I didn't pay much attention to him other than thinking he'd forgotten something in the store and that he was a jerk for blasting his stereo so loud.

A few minutes later, he came back out of the store and walked right up to the front of my car where he just stopped. I looked up from the back window where I'd been cleaning off the road grime to see him standing there with his legs spread and his arms crossed. Then suddenly it was if he snapped into focus and the full realization of what this guy was about hit me full force! All up and down his arms, across his chest and even on the sides of his head was a sea of ink. He was covered with tattooed symbols of the white supremacy movement. Iron crosses, a confederate flag, swastikas, a hooded Klan member with a burning cross; all of these leapt out at me like crazy 3-d cartoons. But he clearly wasn't a cartoon and this wasn't a joke; the menace was palpable. It was very obvious that he meant for me to feel intimidated and afraid. And it was working as the metallic taste of fear began to fill my mouth.

At about the same time, the lyrics from the loudly playing music in his car

began to filter through to my brain. What was passing for a band had the lead singer screaming obscenities and chanting the words – WHITE POWER – like shotgun blasts in between a brutal, grinding cacophony of noise. The lyrics were calling for the death of mud people, faggots, spics, kikes, and wetbacks. Over and over the maniacal chorus was, “Kill them all, kill them all! WHITE POWER!”

He looked very deliberately at my front tag: a rainbow with the word Chicana carved into it. Underneath the word Chicana was a small Mexican flag. I guess he must have thought he'd hit the jackpot of intolerance, a two for one sale, as it were a Mexican-American dyke.

He raised his eyes to meet mine and the fury and venom rippled across his face. He slowly lifted his hand and pointed his forefinger at me like an accuser and then rotating his hand slowly with his forefinger still extended, he brought his thumb up so that it became the trigger of his symbolic gun. He actually wasn't a very big man stature wise; but at that moment he appeared to be about ten feet tall. And though he never spoke, the message was deafening. It silenced the furious pounding of my heart in my ears.

He stood that way for the longest moment of my life. The world around me suddenly felt surreal; surely this wasn't happening to me! Crazy thoughts raced through my head, wondering if this was the day that my refusal to hide my queerness and my pride in my Mexican heritage would be the end of me.

Just as I thought that my lungs would burst from their fear-induced paralysis, a car pulled up into the spot on the other side of the pump where I was parked. At this intrusion of a possible witness, the guy began to step back, his “gun” in front of him, still aimed at me. After about three steps, he dropped his hand and turned and walked to his car. And still not a word had been exchanged between us.

He opened the door to his car and just before getting into it, he turned and drew himself up to attention and threw his arm up in the air in front of him in a crisp Nazi salute. In retrospect it is laughable, him standing there mustering every ounce of military bearing that he could; wearing only tattoos, cutoffs and combat boots, his salute held firmly in the air. But right as it was happening, you couldn't have paid me a million bucks to even crack a smile.

At last he dropped his arm and throwing me one last contemptuous look, he climbed into his car. And while I wouldn't have believed it possible, he cranked up the stereo even louder, clearly continuing his message to me. Then at long last he started the car and time began to move again as he pulled away from the pump. I watched him go, praying that he would not turn up the interstate ramp going the way that I would be traveling.

When he drove off in the opposite direction I exhaled the breath it seems that I'd been holding for some time. I had always known that there were people like him out in the world. And on this day I now knew it personally, in a way that I would never forget.



I sat there in my car, shaken and scared, the fear crawling from the pit of my stomach all the way to the back of my throat. The thought of him out there with a real gun, sitting in wait hammered my brain, paralyzing me. I knew I was going to have to drive somewhere, either to my mom's or give up and go back home.

The thought crossed my mind to call the cops, but oftentimes for queer people that isn't the safest choice. After what seemed like forever, I decided this guy was not going to ruin my holiday. I pointed my car south.

I spent the next seven hours with my heart in my throat, afraid that any minute the Thunderbird would come blasting up behind me. I never said a word to my brothers or mother about what had happened. And while it was good to be home with my family, my visit was tainted throughout its duration. The undercurrent of fear of having to make the drive home never subsided during the visit.

The day to leave came much too soon. I squeezed my mom tight and kissed her one last time and forced my fear aside long enough to get into the car. My head knew that the chances of running into this guy again were slim, but I also knew that nothing was impossible. I was scared. I felt like I couldn't breathe as I fiddled with my mirrors and re-adjusted my seat for the tenth time. I just couldn't shake it. Nevertheless, I finally steeled myself, snapped on my seat belt and pulled out of the safety of my mom's driveway and headed for home.

I'd been on the highway for about 45 minutes when I looked over and saw a little white truck with Georgia plates and a big rainbow pride bumper sticker right in the middle of the tailgate go past me. On the back glass was another rainbow sticker that denoted that this was a "Family Truck". My uneasiness diminished somewhat as I pulled up next to them; I smiled and waved at the two dykes in the truck. They grinned at me and one flashed a peace sign and the other one waved too. We stayed together all the way into Georgia.

My apprehension returned at their departure from the highway, for now I was nearing the point where the incident had occurred. I felt like I couldn't get a deep breath and once again, fear was taking over.

And then there it was; an older, kind of beat up, blue Chevrolet with Michigan plates. Plastered all over the rear bumper big as life were scads of rainbow, justice and pride stickers. Relief washed over me as I got up next to the car and waved to the guy driving. He smiled and waved back and for me it was just about the best feeling I'd ever had at finding another queer out here on the highway! I wanted to stay near him as long as I possibly could. I even followed him off the exit ramp at one point hoping he was stopping for gas, which I needed. He was. In the store we said hi in that casual way that was all about letting each other know that we recognized one another. We both headed back out on the highway and I stayed near him pretty much across the state of Georgia. I was close to the South Carolina border when he left the highway. I was glad to have had his company as it were and I was feeling much better.

I had enough gas to get me home and wonder of wonders; I was definitely feeling less afraid.

About 30 miles after my last friend had left the road, a big red pick-up with Kentucky plates and a woman driving alone came up beside me. As she passed me, she smiled and waved to me, and from the looks of her, I figured that she was a dyke too. I guessed she had seen my stickers and recognized “family” on the road. As she went on by I saw that I’d been right, there in her back window was a rainbow pride sticker and a big pink triangle. I stayed close to her as I headed into the last leg of my journey and she was still going up the highway when I waved bye to her and got off at the exit that would take me on home.

Sure, I could have stayed scared and when I got home scraped off all my rainbow and pride stickers. And believe me, it did occur to me to do just that. But fear makes you a prisoner and I decided that wasn’t for me, I want to live this life. And that means living it as all of who I am! So the stickers and my front tag stayed on my car and eventually they were joined by others.

Since then anytime I drive, but especially when I take a holiday trip, I always keep an eye out for the “family” stickers while I’m on the road. I like to think that others who see my rainbow and pride stickers will feel a little less alone and just a bit safer as they head to their destinations. And I always hope that the “rainbow angels” are on the road right at the exact times when and where they are most needed; just the way they were when I needed them on that Thanksgiving trip home.



*Mi cuerpo es mío por mariana pessah*

## BAYWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CIRCA 1972

*Glorya F. Cabrera*

*"Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner,  
Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner..."*

The slaughter is on and I  
am the unwilling lamb  
surrounded by *blue-eyed devils*  
long semi-stringy semi-way hues  
of blonde hair whips in the wind  
my ears cringe inward as if  
wanting to cover themselves  
my arms hang frozen  
down the sides of my body  
cornered by hostile chants  
and playground humiliation  
out of nowhere I wonder  
which face matters the most

*The Barbie Doll*

*or The Shirley Temple?*

that I look like neither  
is a lost afterthought as  
my brown eyes lose focus  
of the favored ones who  
loom above, around me  
laughing taunting smirking  
chanting louder and faster

*"Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner, Beaner..."*

If ever there was a hell on earth  
this is the training ground for the devil  
I scan the yard desperate praying  
for a miracle to happen right now  
right on this spot oh dear lord  
part the red seas deliver me from evil  
David, strike down these Goliaths  
Where is the prince on a white horse?

only help never comes  
no teacher races across the yard  
no mother father sister or brother  
to pluck me from this insanity  
only me perspiring under the hot sun

under the heat of hate  
under the burden of silence  
under the shame of wanting to look  
like those blue-eyed devils

Laughter harsh and haughty fills my ears  
bounces off the shimmering blacktop  
over an array of monkey bars  
across an empty baseball field  
flings itself into a mocking California sky  
Tears blur my vision  
I see nothing but my own two feet  
lost in the fear of the moment  
the not wanting to know why  
but deep inside I know of their hatred  
my brown almond shaped eyes  
peer from under shiny brown bangs  
my skin olive-yellow tans brown  
smaller than most of the other girls  
I know I don't belong

Searching for words to sting back  
hot sour silence flows out  
of my half-open lips  
defeated defenseless denied  
my shoulders slump over  
my face burns red  
Saved by the bell signaling  
the end of another school day  
I flee through darkened hallways  
to the safety of the yellow bus  
in front of the school  
that takes my older sister, me  
and the rest of the kids  
down the hill cross town  
into our quiet little neighborhood

That night in the comfort of  
an old white Victorian house  
seated at the kitchen table  
I work up the courage to ask,  
*"Mommie, why do girls at school call me beaner,  
we eat chicken, rice and salad?"*

Mommie is so beautiful  
 Her eyes are hazel not brown  
 Her skin is alabaster not olive-yellow  
 Her thick auburn hair hangs waist length  
 When she smiles, her dimples show  
 She's never mistaken for Mexican  
 People marvel at her perfect Spanish  
 equally pleased with her lightly accented perfect English

Tonight after hearing my question  
 Her smile and dimples disappear  
 she frowns looking at the three of us  
 baby brother, older sister and me saying,  
     *"Eat your food, if those kids call you names  
     Don't fight back, pretend you don't hear them  
     Remember what Jesus would do – turn the other cheek"*

Her hazel eyes look oddly off into the distance  
 A shiver passes through my body  
     a ghost walks over my grave  
 My question hangs in the air awkwardly  
 like a bad joke intrusively like a foul odor  
 everyone becomes uncomfortable  
 I sit silently with my eyes cast down,  
 my fork plays with bits of whiteness  
 rice and chicken  
 chicken and rice  
 rice and chicken  
 chicken and rice  
 and as I continue  
 to sit in our warm cozy kitchen  
 with mother not wrapping a comforting  
 arm round my shoulder I say no more  
 about those blue-eyed devils  
 I say no more about  
 the names they call me  
 the way my heart pounds  
 the tears I hold inside  
 No I stay silent about the three  
 older blue-eyed devils who ganged up  
 on my sister in front of the bus  
 pulling her hair shouting bad names  
 laughing in a way that made  
 everything about us feel dirty



I wanted to make them stop  
I wanted to make them stop  
    *I wanted to make them stop*  
but all I could do was scream  
    all I could do was scream  
        All I did was Scream!  
the lady behind the wheel  
of that yellow school bus  
sat  
watching

With thoughts tormenting my mind  
I wondered why help never comes  
Why we're the ones to hate and to make cry  
finally I ask what I did that was so bad  
that God lets them treat me this way  
and I don't believe turning the other cheek  
is the answer to my problems  
so I dwell on the word Beaner  
which to the best of my knowledge  
are those brown pinto beans  
in the tasty tacos at the Taco Bell  
across from our favorite park  
where mommie takes us to eat  
as a special treat for being good

But the way those blue-eyed devils  
with wicked cunning smiles  
flickering across perfect American faces  
chant in high pitched smirking tones  
tells me that being a Beaner isn't good  
Mommie's silence makes me nervous  
Shame pricks my insides  
I still don't understand why  
they hate with such delight  
I do know tomorrow  
walking through darkened hallways  
looking over my shoulder  
wary of hostile attacks  
Baywood Elementary School  
is the last place I want to be



## Lesbian activism is....



*Juanita y Ochy cantando (Juanita Ramos y Ochy Curiel) por mariana pessah*

I see poetry as historical documentation, making it a forceful form of activism in its own right.

*T. Jackie Cuevas*

I practice activism by translating environmentalist brochures from English to Spanish – volunteer work regarding the dangers of everyday chemicals and pesticides and their nontoxic alternatives.

*Mayra Lazara Dole*

For me activism takes on many shapes, not restricted to the public sphere, but rather some of the most delicate political dialogues take place in the privacy of our bedrooms. What I mean to say is that being in a woman loving woman relationship is an act of rebellion in itself. To love, to hold your partner's hand, to speak, refuse to be silenced, are political acts.

*Cristina Izaguirre*

Writing my story is a political act in that my voice adds to lesbian visibility. I think, I speak, I write, ergo, I exist. I love other women, ergo, I am a lesbian. Giving witness to my own existence prevents the perpetuation of lies and stereotypes about lesbians. Who was it that said that the pen is mightier than the sword? In the list of war weapons published by the U.S. Information Service, we find "Words." In the same spirit as the Harlem Renaissance, I give flight to the many voices inside of me that the powers that be would prefer to extinguish.

*Rosita Ángulo Libre de Marulanda*  
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To me to be an activist, or essentially partaking in activism, means a number of things and is unique to each individual. Poetry and performance poetry can be used as a catalyst for social change. I also consider my use of spoken-word poetry and performing my poetry as another medium to express the inner conversation of the self. My work ranges from a number of issues: from sexuality to ethnicity to exemplifying and paying homage to the selfless strength of the human spirit.

*Nicole Marie López*

## Activismo lésbico es....

Activismo lésbico es la acción organizada que emprendemos las lesbianas contra la sociedad heterosexista. Busca la transformación social hacia la construcción de una sociedad justa, plural y democrática. En ese sentido, se vincula con otros movimientos sociales que comparten estos principios.

*Gloria Careaga*

El Closet de Sor Juana, México

El activismo lésbico para mí es el resultado de muchas cosas, principalmente las que permiten entenderme como una construcción con una implicancia social, cultural y política importante, al llamarse lesbiana, al llamarse mujer, al llamarse feminista. Quizá una forma diferente de como lo conciben las que tienen más trayectoria, quizá porque soy joven, quizá porque siento que todo lo que me permite estar aquí escribiendo esta palabra me faculta, me permite pensar e indagar sobre lo que soy, lo que implico, lo que significo. Para mí, el hacer activismo lésbico está asociado a una manera de concebir el mundo desde una perspectiva política y verlo desde ahí. No saldría a la calle si lo que hago no me identificara, si mi grupo no me identificara, y también si no pensara que el mundo al final puede ser distinto, y precisamente porque comparto un ideal y aquellos ideales se accionan con el activismo. Al final se vuelve un sentimiento eufórico, de caer en cuenta de que hay posibilidad de realizar los sueños...cambios de base en esta macroconstrucción.

Después de muchas formas de pensarlo, de revisarlo, y de analizarlo, siempre llego a la misma conclusión: el activismo para mí también es en parte arte que permite dar a conocer lo invisibilizado. Me parece importante destacar la idea de producir una desconstrucción en los diferentes ámbitos de la vida, así como también realizar este activismo de forma prepositiva por medio del campo donde estoy inmersa. Que si bien es cierto está ligado históricamente como una construcción que provee el sistema y facultada por él, existen en él ciertas fugas que tomo como referente en buena parte de lo que produzco, lo que elaboro persistentemente en el presente. Se trata de la influencia de la estética feminista y el denominado arte feminista, mayormente desarrollado por mujeres norteamericanas y europeas, bajo un prisma analítico de la existencia, y tomando como correlación, las problemáticas que tanto el arte – de acción teoría – como la realidad política confiere en relación directa a lo que somos con respecto al todo.

Es gratificante contar con las imágenes callejeras de dar a conocer lo que se piensa...expresarlo, sentirlo, emanarlo, es lindo y eso es lo que me mueve finalmente. Libertad, revolución sin piedras...puños políticos alzados, consientes y emancipados de la sujeción que provee este sistema patricado.

***Marlene Molina S. (Chispa)***

Sobre el tema del activismo, creo que en efecto hay muchas formas de verlo y de vivirlo. No sólo implica salir a la luz pública, pero esto es muchas veces necesario pues los medios de comunicación están pendientes a todo, y mientras más alcance tenga tu proyecto o tus acciones, se va a enterar la prensa. En mi experiencia personal ha sido así, y por supuesto es difícil asumirse a gran escala, salir del clóset a lo grande, pero no es necesario hacerlo de forma escandalosa. En cierta medida una puede mantenerse al margen de los medios, pero hay que tomar en cuenta que ahora los medios lo son todo, son el cuarto poder, y como tal, son un medio necesario para dar a conocer los proyectos y todo lo que una activista realice desde sus horizontes.

***Nadia Rosso***

Defino activismo lésbico como toda muestra de apoyo y lealtad por hacer que nuestros reclamo de respeto e igualdad sean escuchados. Es la lucha conciente y dirigida para alcanzar los mismos beneficios que reciben a diario los miembros heterosexuales de la sociedad. Coincido que activismo lésbico no es sólo hablar por aquellas que callan voluntaria u obligatoriamente. Activismo lésbico es solidaridad. En la medida que una mujer lesbiana sirve de consuelo a otra lesbiana y la educa en cuanto a sus derechos y deberes está haciendo activismo lésbico. Concluyo, afirmando que, activismo lésbico: es todo aquello que no muestre indiferencia o pasividad ante el maltrato, discrimen y degradación de la mujer lesbiana sin importar su credo, su raza o afiliación política.

***Leni Rivera, M.Ed.***



# Mujeres creando comunidad

Nuestro activismo lésbico feminista tiene sus raíces en las formas iniciales de nuestra profunda sospecha de que el mundo que nos recibió no estaba nada bien. Poco a poco la sospecha tuvo crudas confirmaciones hasta que los años 90s, con un neoliberalismo y una tecnocracia de género impunes en sus acciones devastadoras, nos dieron la confirmación y certeza que el mundo no solo no estaba bien, sino que iba para peor. Entonces, había pues que cambiarlo, así es que comenzamos nuestro activismo lésbico feminista desde la comunidad *Mujeres Creando*, en 1990.

El feminismo es el movimiento que dá origen y al que confluimos a la vez desde cada una de nuestras acciones. Cuando el activismo no nace del movimiento o cuando no acaba en el movimiento, traba el movimiento, es una catarsis eterna, se convierte en un estertor constante que no contagia, que no energiza, que más bien agota sentido y que por eso mismo es muy fácil de ser comido y reciclado por el propio sistema de dominaciones y opresiones.

Actualmente en Bolivia, nuestro desafío es construir un movimiento social desde nuestros cuerpos de mujeres, con un feminismo desde nuestras raíces ancestrales indígenas de luchas y utopías, un movimiento revolucionario capaz de convocar a las mujeres pero también de seducir a los varones que quieran un sociedad sin opresiones, ni dominaciones. Por eso, cuando grafiteamos las paredes, cuando teñimos las aceras de verde, azul o rojo, cuando damos un discurso, una charla, una guitarreada o un video, en todas nuestras acciones está la convocatoria a construir nuestras utopías aquí y ahora. Recorren nuestros cuerpos esas energías que mueven el mundo, para bien, y que desde sus raíces de opresiones ancestrales, las socavan y de una vez terminan con los sufrimientos de la humanidad.

Por supuesto que en este mundo construido desde la libertad, el amor transita travieso, todos los rincones donde nuestra corpórea humanidad se recicla y en este territorio, de cicatrices, identidades y expectativas, como mujeres amar a las mujeres, es para nosotras la partecita más bella del amor.

Y ahí radica la energía del movimiento. La energía fundamental para nuestro activismo está en nuestro profundo amor por las mujeres. Estamos enamoradas de las mujeres y somos amantes de las mujeres. Pero éste amor no



nos encierra en las mujeres, al contrario nos expande el corazón y las luchas  
mas allá de cualquier frontera.

Cuando una mujer ama  
el mundo mismo se conmueve  
la natura anda perturbada  
sacude de locura a los animales  
amorean las gatas en los tejados

Cuando una mujer ama  
el calor abrigado de su útero, se extiende  
hay suficiente energía  
para mover el cielo  
el mar, los sistemas, las estructuras  
los esquemas

Cuando una mujer ama  
brota miel de los basurales  
sale música jaranera de los hospitales  
y todas las niñas y los niños  
tienen frutas, poesía  
música y amor en cantidades  
iiii EN CANTIDADES !!!!!

Cuando una mujer ama usa sus hermosos sueños  
como presagios de realidades  
y al movimiento mágico de sus caderas  
la tierra dá  
– además de rotaciones y traslaciones –

iiii REVOLUCIONES !!!!!

Poesía de Julieta Paredes integrante de Comunidad Mujeres Creando.  
Ver: mujerescreando@gmail.com; Tel: 591-2-2216368



## “¡Escucha, escucha, estamos en la lucha!”: A Mexicana-Salvadoreña Lesbian’s Road to Activism

*Antonieta Gimeno*

One summer night while cooking at a friend’s house, the smells of her *bacalao*, *sofrito*, red peppers and eggplant filled the air of her kitchen, while I shared the idea of writing an essay about my activism. She asked me how I had become one. A bit baffled by the question I said, “I guess I was ready when I met the people who were doing community organizing, then she asked, “What about your mother?”

The smells from the kitchen followed me all the way to the train stop, bringing memories of my mother, her *sazón*, and both of us cooking up a storm in the kitchen many years ago, back in Mexico City: The first women’s laboratory for housekeeping training, but also a place of resistance, where mothers and daughters formed alliances, learned lessons about balancing acts, between rebelling and keeping peace. I thought about the question. In truth, I had been curious myself about it: How and why does one become engaged in political action? Writing this brief “embodiment of experience” has served as vehicle to reflect on my particular process to become a warrior and an artist: A community organizer. As I did, I realized it was my mother’s rebelliousness that planted the first seed of activism in my heart. Many years later, it was the Puerto Rican community that made this seed grow and propelled me into a scene of ideas, fighting for justice and love of community.

**Childhood: Lessons on Self-Determination.** My dear and missed mother, born in El Salvador, San Salvador and dead now for 29 years, was an extraordinary woman. She was not an activist in the strict sense of the word, nor would she call herself a feminist. But her personal actions certainly spoke loudly of a fierce determination to be her own person, to educate herself about literature, philosophy and learn other languages. She became fluent in English and French. I remember her insistence not to miss her classes. At night, after dinner, she sat at the dining table working on her homework. As a woman in her late forties, she was determined to learn all the things she couldn’t when she was younger. Balancing her intellectual hunger and her duties as a wife was a challenge. She and my stepfather fought frequently because he wanted to keep her “in her place.” As I think back on it, her tenacity and determination to break the chains of servitude were strong influences during my childhood. But the determining factor in building my character I would have to say was my mother teaching me about discipline.

My mother was a complex, contradictory and often mysterious person. She was loving and affectionate. Especially when I was sick, she nurtured and

pampered me. But if I misbehaved as often children do, she could be severe, almost cruel in her disciplining. One time during my early teenage years, I had suffered a viral infection causing a paralysis on half of my face. I was diagnosed with Bell's Palsy. The timing for this ordeal could not have been worse. When you are a teenager your face and body are the passport to social success and I already had many problems in this area. My natural reaction was to hide my "monster face," stay at home while going through intense treatment. Immediately following the diagnosis my mother said in a commanding voice, "You are not going to stay home. You are going to go to school and keep doing your normal life. This will pass." So there I was, skinny little old me, facing ridicule and morbid curiosity from school mates and people on the streets. And while painful, this was a profound lesson in courage and determination. Both my mother's example and the discipline she inculcated in me to face adversity, were my foundation for activism.

**Crossing the Border: My First Lessons in US History.** In 1965, I graduated from nursing school which proved a good decision on my part. I had heard that life in the United States was better, that "the streets were paved with gold." Feeling defeated and trapped, I was desperate to leave. With the help of a boyfriend, I processed my documentation and was lucky to obtain my green card based on my profession. Rather impetuously I left Mexico and immigrated to the U.S. I don't remember the details of that day at the airport, of what I felt. All I knew is that I wanted to escape somewhere. The fact that I had secured a job in the U.S.A. made my departure easier.

I arrived in Texas in March of 1968, to work as a graduate nurse (as opposed to a registered nurse which would come later), at one of the most important medical centers in Houston. During my brief stay, I encountered several Chicana or Mexican American nurses (I can't recall how they defined themselves), many of them Licensed Practical Nurses. From the onset it was clear I "rubbed them the wrong way." They looked at me funny, made jokes about me being a "wet back." As I think of it now, I can only guess their reasons. Perhaps it was because I came from the other side, from the perceived "real" Mexico, *del otro lado del Río Grande*. I didn't look like them, I "looked white," a "güera," a blonde, a *gavacha*, someone with privilege, a suspect. Maybe it was because I was a graduate nurse that put me above them in the nursing hierarchy. My ignorance about the history of Chicanos, whites and racism, was total. I just couldn't understand why they treated me unkindly. Whatever the reasons, neither side had the tools to help the situation.

In 1970, I traveled north to the city of Boston, driving my first owned car. The first years were like a fog and adjusting to the ways of the north was rough. I was young and inexperienced. After three attempts, I finally obtained my license as a Registered Nurse and I started working as a Public Health nurse at a local community health center. During my home visits, I met the other side of "America;" poor people, Black, white and Puerto Rican. I heard their stories,

witnessed their conditions. I felt helpless and acted as the professional who knows better. This was the beginning of my awakening and the realization that the streets rather than “paved with gold” were landmines treacherous and unkind. The people I met – my patients – were remarkable people. Their humanity touched me deeply and transformed me. From them I learned the importance of community, of patience and humor. Later I began to question why they lived in such rundown buildings. Why were the mothers on welfare instead of having regular jobs? Why were children staying home and not in school? Why were elders taking 20 pills a day to improve their health?

Slowly I began to see the discrepancies, the arrogance from the providers. Frustrated with the health field and its inability to help them or me understand the inequities, I decided to go somewhere else for answers

“**¡Despierta Boricua, Defiende lo Tuyo!**” Coincidentally, I began to cross paths with Puerto Ricans who lived or worked in these same communities and were actively involved in political work. Many of them were socialists who were dedicated to the independence of Puerto Rico and addressing issues affecting Puerto Ricans on the mainland. Their platform was built from a self-determination, anti-colonialist, and anti-militarist perspective. The women and men leading these community efforts were seasoned organizers, poets, labor leaders, and writers who had a deep knowledge of the economic and social reality of Puerto Rico, and of the local conditions affecting many Puerto Ricans forced to emigrate to the US. They were loving, passionate, and compassionate people who taught me the history of their country, made me appreciate the beauty and richness of their culture and the importance of building community. It was exhilarating to learn the truth about their situation and find the answers to the troubling questions I had during my work as a nurse. This turned my gaze to my own history and people. After a trial period I was asked to join the Puerto Rican Socialist Party and became an integral part of the movement.

**Local and International Sisterhood.** Even with my mother’s example, I had no real connection or identification with being a woman as a site of power and strength. Meeting feminists of color and reading about feminism opened a fantastic world for me. This gave me the language to understand the prevalent misogynist practices. More importantly, I was able to use this power to transform my life, to address the hurt, the injustice. To know that women around the world were fighting their oppression in their communities made me feel part of something bigger than me.

One of the first groups I joined was the *Comité de Mujeres Puerto Riqueñas “Miriam López Pérez”* named after a Puerto Rican woman who was murdered by a former boyfriend in spite of a restraining order. Our efforts involved raising issues that impacted Puerto Rican and other women of color, particularly poor, focused on housing, reproductive and health rights, and bilingual education. We organized forums, marches, and cultural events to

educate and agitate to draw the connections between people's common basic human needs and the struggle for Puerto Rico's self-determination.

Around age 32 I found out that my mother was from El Salvador. This new revelation compelled me to focus my international work to support a group of women from El Salvador, the Mothers of the Tortured, Murdered and Disappeared, *Las Comadres*. These brave women literally put their lives on the line by publicly demanding that their government release their loved ones and return them home safe. Their slogan was: "*¡Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos!*" Together with a dear friend, we organized the Friends of *Comadres*, a group of lesbians and straight women to provide logistical support, fundraising, and organizing national tours. Our goal was to educate U.S. officials and the public about the least reported war in history and how our taxes were supporting unspeakable crimes against an entire population. This experience reaffirmed my commitment and inspiration to continue doing the work because it demonstrated what women were capable of doing to fight for justice.

**Giving Birth to Myself.** Along with discovering the power of political action from a radical feminist perspective, came the discovery of sexual attraction towards women. I remember standing in a street corner in Mexico City at age seven or eight, waiting to cross the street. A school bus approached and stopped. I looked up and a girl gazed intently at me. I responded with a flirtatious wink bowing my head. I was startled and so was she. I had a strange feeling of exhilaration. It took many years and several failed attempts to openly admit I was sexually attracted to women and to face my own homophobia, to come out of the shadows to claim myself totally. One day, love literally knocked at my door and I fell madly in love with a woman. This was the catalyst for my coming out. Loving and making love to a woman for the first time, at the age of 45 was exquisite. I had never felt this kind of pleasure and joy. It was the first time I didn't experience pain or shame. It liberated me. Coming out as a lesbian was a natural thing to do. I was becoming a woman unto myself.

**Intergenerational Work.** In 1979, I became a single mother by choice. This event, for which I was not prepared, opened another powerful path of personal discovery and activism. As my twin children entered the Boston public schools, I became their advocate, first to protect their rights and then I joined other parents to establish the first Latino independent grassroots organization, the Latino Parents Association, to advance the rights of all Latino students.

One of the loves of my life, and one of the most important roles I have played as a community organizer, has been working with young people of all races, ethnicities, and sexual/gender orientations. From them I learned some of the most fundamental lessons about human liberation. As teachers, youth taught us the notion that if adults want respect, they have to teach it by example. I am grateful to all of them for sharing their experiences – which were so close to mine when I was their age. My two children add to this blessing. They also



have been my teachers in all the sense of the word. I am proud to witness that the values I instilled in them took such strong root. Both my children are organizers de *pura cepa* fiercely committed to justice. As my mother, my adopted Puerto Rican community, and countless of other comrades did for me, I have done for my children. Thus, the circle is completed and this fills my heart with joy and pride.

**The Future: My Role as an Elder Lesbian.** Someone asked what kind of activism is needed to change things. This is a tall order and a question open for everybody. But here are some thoughts. One of my concerns has been the growing sentiment of apathy and cynicism – a reaction to feeling betrayed by our leaders and government and hopelessness for the losses we have suffered in our struggles. We need to start planting the seeds again to affirm our capacity for agency.

There is no question that we are heading for more troubled times and that the participation of ordinary people, not only of activists and leaders, will be crucial. Perhaps we need to ask if change is possible. The answer should always be YES! But change will be elusive if we don't define it and we choose to not see ourselves as part of it. We need to nurture a new kind of leadership at the grassroots level that reflects social justice values and challenge ourselves to discard models that have not served us well, those that create divisions and hierarchies. We need to give each other a sense of renewal and possibility. We can't afford not to. Finally, to keep on keeping on, our souls need tending. It will be difficult to attain peace anywhere or address our differences unless we find peace and compassion inside us. Our true liberation rests on this transformation.

The roots of my political commitment are deep and long. I was an ordinary, scrawny, desperate youth trying to find her way in the world. And with the help of many people, I have. As an elder lesbian I am intrigued and excited to continue my role mentoring, supporting, and encouraging the leadership of young people, especially LGBT, immigrants and people of color, to continue the tradition of radical activism, wherever this may be.

## The Point that is My Pen

*Ana-Maurine Lara*

My face was on the evening news. I didn't see it. The host family I was staying with told me. I was at the front of the march. It was December 1, 1995 – World AIDS Day and I was marching with the Grupo Gay da Bahia, holding the banner, my fist raised in the air, shouting for human rights and access to health care.

I had been in Brazil for two months at that point, with a student exchange program, and had already experienced the intersections of oppression in deep, painful ways. I had been living in the town of Fortaleza, Ceará, where my experiences of racism and anti-Semitism forced me to leave my middle class host family and move in with a host family in the *favela*, which was just fine with me. Because my own extended family is poor, the *favela* felt familiar; also people didn't look at me strangely for being dark and butch. And my short hair didn't raise an eyebrow. However, I was still feeling isolated because of my sexuality. I was the only out lesbian in the group of students, and even then, I wasn't out to my host families. I had to leave Fortaleza.

In November, I left Fortaleza and went down to Salvador da Bahia, where I breathed freely for the first time in months. For one, I was around dark-skinned people, Black people, and so I fit right in. Two, I was living with a middle class Black host family – which meant that I was slightly shielded from daily violence. And three, I found other gay people. One day, as I walked down a small side street, I looked up and saw a pink triangle. I walked upstairs and immediately made friends with the lesbians in the room – activists who were fighting on specific issues of human rights and health access. Jane and Zora told me about the LGBT community of Bahia. They shared horrendous statistics on anti-gay violence. They also took me out to lesbian plays, bars, and we watched lesbian movies together. I felt as if I had found home away from home.

I was 20 years old at the time and deeply embedded in LGBT activism back in Boston, where I was in school. I was the Political Education coordinator for the LGBT group on campus, responsible for bringing speakers like Lani Ka'ahumanu and Melba Martínez to address our university on issues such as ENDA (Employment Non-Discrimination Act) and health access. I was a peer counselor for LGBT students. In the larger Boston community, I was working with other lesbians on issues of anti-queer violence and welfare reform, as well as reproductive rights: all economic and identity-based issues, closely linked by lesbian and bisexual colored bodies.

My evolution as an activist began in the late 1980s/early 1990s with my work on multicultural education campaigns in high school. We were living



in the times of the First Gulf War, Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, the aftermath of the Rodney King beatings, and the beginning of Clinton's administration. My work as an organizer really began when I rallied my fellow 9<sup>th</sup> graders and their parents to oust a racist English teacher. It evolved into the normative forms of leadership (class President, organizing student groups), as well as school-based activism, such as student walk-outs, political education on issues of multi-cultural education and religious freedom (non-Christians were a minority in the school).

I came out of the closet to myself and close friends when I was 16, still in high school and just beginning to make all the connections between different forms of oppression. My first entry into LGBT awareness was the annual AIDS walk in New York City in 1992. I remember spotting the first visible lesbian of color in the crowd: she had short hair, was wearing gloves and was holding out condoms. I went up to her and was so excited that I don't remember what I asked, only that I had spoken to another lesbian and that somehow, this made me feel I was possible. And, that as a lesbian, AIDS was my concern too.

My coming out coincided with my college applications. In the spring of 1993, I went to visit different campuses. I felt so new to "gay life" and was still a little closeted (somewhere deep inside I was worried they'd take back my offer to go to school should they find out I was gay). At each campus, I'd look around for any evidence of gay people. Ironically enough, the weekend of the 1993 March on Washington I was in Cambridge, Mass. visiting the school that would become my alma mater: Harvard. When I walked onto the Harvard campus, there were pink triangles in the courtyard and balloons protesting the U.S. policies on gays in the military. I knew I had found where I wanted to be, not because it was Harvard, but because there were gay people and they specifically had a political presence.

I knew, once I got to school, that political activism was going to be something that sustained me during my time in college. I made a point of joining the LGBT Peer Counseling group, and the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Student Association. As part of these groups, I did political education work and dialogue with other student groups on campus. My first year, a gay Latino friend, Rudy, and I, presented *una plática* for the Latin@ community on LGBT identity. The talk allowed us to have frank conversations with other current and potential leaders within the on-campus community. I had already had incidents where people refused to work with me because I was gay, and so I was encouraged that this *plática* might change things. During the course of the *plática*, we ran into the usual issues of homophobia as they present themselves in the Latin@ communities: "You're trying to be white." "It's just a phase." "How can you be Latina@ and gay when we don't have that in our countries?," etc, which Rudy and I met with grace. I didn't yet know of the existence of the national Latin@ LGBT organization, LLEGO, but I had

read Juanita Ramos' *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians* and Cherié Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*. I knew that our lives were not in isolation, nor were they specific to the U.S. context. I knew that the *plática* was the first step in making the campus safer for other Latin@ LGBT people to come out.

After that year, I continued to do campus activism, but I was frustrated with the limited language that people employed to talk about issues in the campus communities, and I wanted to have more involvement with what was happening in the non-college world. I began to work in the LGBT and women of color communities in Boston. I became a Lesbian Avenger, which didn't last very long due to poor race, class, and gender politics, but it did allow me to meet really radical lesbians, bisexual women and trans activists in the Boston area who were engaged in multi-issue organizing. They, and the work we did together, gave me access to new ways of thinking about organizing, and the intersections of oppression on an international scale. It was shortly after meeting them that I went to spend the summer in the Dominican Republic and then went on to Brazil.

In the summer of 1995, I went to Santo Domingo. There I met other dominicana lesbianas. Meeting them, learning about our mutual struggles, freed me from my fear that maybe I was playing into U.S. notions of identity. It also gave me a deep sense of security – no matter where I am in the world, there are others like me. I was in Santo Domingo focusing on issues of racism and xenophobia, and I gained deep insight into the connections between these different forms of oppression and homophobia. For one, LGBT bodies, like Black or foreign bodies, become the site for the nation state to project its anxieties about morality when economic displacement creates shifts in the population. This insight proved useful in understanding the language of U.S. policies like the Contract for America (what I and others would come to refer to as the Contract *on* America) and the various California anti-immigrant/anti-civil rights propositions I would find myself working on the following year (1996).

So in November 1995, when I was in Salvador, Bahia, and Jane, Zora, and Luis asked me if I wanted to help with the protests on World AIDS Day, I said, "Yes," without hesitation. I knew that I was willing to put my body on the line and in line with other LGBT Latin@ bodies, no matter the context. And that being recognized as Latina, and a lesbiana in Brazil only served to confirm all of what I knew to be true: our struggles were linked despite geography. So when my host mother saw me on the television, I realized that I was not alone and that despite her homophobia, I was safe and I was free.

The following summer after Brazil, I went to San Francisco for the first time and worked at Lyon-Martin Women's Health Services as an intern. I worked on their outreach team. My lover at the time was doing an internship at the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and so I also

ended up working on the campaigns against Proposition 187 (funny how desire and political work are so closely linked, huh?), one of many of California's anti-immigrant measures. During that time, I became committed to doing HIV and Human Rights work, not just because my gay brothers were suffering from the epidemic, but because internationally, women of color were deeply vulnerable. HIV positive lesbians had even fewer resources. And I, as a lesbian of color, felt affected on multiple fronts. My activism at that point moved specifically into the field of HIV education and political action.

My heart was fired up when in the Fall of 1996 I went to my first Latin@ LGBT conference, LLEGO's *Encuentro*. Irma Torres, with whom I was working at Lyon-Martin, had told me about it. I was so excited, and even though I didn't know how I was going to get there, I knew I had to go. I ended up taking a bus from Boston, staying with my tía (who didn't know at the time that I was gay), and I went to every possible workshop I could. I met the most amazing people, people I still admire and respect to this day, people with whom I have a history, people who were and are doing all different kinds of things in their lives to further the rights and dignity of LGBT Latin@s. It was like breathing for the first time. I carried the connections I made at the LLEGO *Encuentro* back to Boston, and met other organizers with whom I deeply connected. All truth be told, the connections from that first *Encuentro* are what came to define the next phase of my activism, and what I would do with my life and my work between 1996 and 2003.

A year after the *Encuentro*, after I graduated from Harvard, I stayed in Boston and was doing HIV research and political education work. During that time I met a group of other young Latin@ LGBT artists. They were committed to using the arts for social change/social justice work and that excited me. I joined them and I began to see the importance of art in activism, and I also began to articulate my own need to create as a form of activism. The work I did with that group planted the seed for how I have come to define activism today.

Also significant during that time was meeting other queer Latin@ Jews and Jews of color. Again, it was another awakening into the connections between different forms of oppression, and a deeper release around my own lived experience. Elesha Miranda, now the founder of Chica Luna Productions, was an important "connector." One of the people I met through Elesha, Lisa Weiner-Mahfuz, was the person with whom I would start the website [bustingbinaries.com](http://bustingbinaries.com), dedicated to examining binary thinking in U.S. based social justice movements.

Between my time in Boston and where I am now, I have explored many avenues of organizing. My struggles in placing myself as an activist have had to do with my geographic shifts – I've moved many times in my life – and with my multi-racial/cultural/national and religious background. Over the years I have discovered that the paradigm of single-issue organizing often leaves out

the most vulnerable members of our communities, usually poor, LGBT people of color, even when we're at the heart of the work. The paradigm of identity-based organizing is also too limiting, and often has left me playing legitimacy games, having to prove I have the right to be there, rather than being able to focus on the larger picture. I cannot focus on local work without taking into account the international context, especially living in the U.S. where local policies have larger international ramifications

So, in my personal struggle to define my place as an organizer, I have come to locate myself in U.S.-based and international social justice movements as an artist – as a Black, Latina, Jewish queer body dedicated to using the pen as my weapon. This position has been controversial, and many people I have met since my shift into this way of organizing have struggled to embrace the idea that art is relevant to political change. In other words, it's not seen as real organizing work by many.

Even with my decision to locate myself as an artist in the movement, I still show up at rallies, I still keep tabs on political issues and respond to them in concrete ways, I still engage in political education. Now, though, I make a point of using art as a central mechanism for creating relationships, for communicating messages, and for documenting our experiences. I also see how art feeds the spirit and ignites the fire of other people. I know that when I write a story that features lesbians as the subjects of our own lives, we are one step to being more visible and to being freer, one step closer to a larger social change.

I've traveled many roads since that day my face was on the evening news in Salvador. But all of them have led me here. As someone who has been changed by art in its many forms, I know the power that art has to reach into the deepest recesses of our emotions. I understand the need for both personal and social transformation – and the need for these things to occur simultaneously. I deeply believe that sharing stories breaks down isolation, and creates new possibilities for dialogue and social change. And, I believe that as the socio-political-economic landscape changes, art will become increasingly central in generating a sense of hope, community and sense of humanity.





*Group Lésbico Universitario por Nadia Rosso*

## El por qué del Carnaval

*Nadia Rosso*

La mayor parte de las críticas y objeciones que se hacen a la Marcha del Orgullo LGBTTT versan sobre su carácter “carnavalesco”. Frases tales como “se ha convertido en un carnaval” son frecuentes incluso, o sobre todo, en miembros de la comunidad LGBTTT. Este tipo de comentarios generalmente van de la mano con la idea de que no es una marcha, pues una marcha tiene connotaciones políticas claras, y esta pérdida de politización se considera una devaluación del evento.

Demos una pequeña ojeada a lo que la palabra carnaval significa. Para la Real Academia de la Lengua Española, carnaval se define de la siguiente manera:

***carnaval:** Fiesta popular que se celebra en los tres días que preceden al comienzo de la Cuaresma, y consiste en mascaradas, comparsas, bailes y otros regocijos bulliciosos.*

Ahora, olvidándonos del sentido religioso que inicialmente tiene el carnaval, recordemos que se ha tomado simplemente de su significado la parte que se refiere a la fiesta, al bullicio, la alegría. Hoy en día es con estos elementos con los que se relaciona directamente el carnaval, sin importar tanto el significado original.

Entonces, el carnaval es una fiesta. ¿Pero qué distingue al carnaval de cualquier otra fiesta? Justo en ello radica la importancia de éste como manifestación pública. Porque ciertamente nadie reprocha que la marcha se haya convertido en una fiesta o una celebración. La peculiaridad implícita en la palabra “carnaval” es, irónicamente, la que puede bien condenarla o bien reivindicarla.

Para ejemplificar esta paradoja, pretendo tomar como modelo al teórico ruso Mijail M. Bajtín, pues rescata de forma interesante la función política del carnaval. Comenzaré por enlistar los elementos del carnaval. Primero, claro está, se trata de una fiesta o una celebración. Pero más allá de eso, en esta celebración está siempre el elemento de transgresión de las normas. Por ejemplo, la coronación del “rey feo”, común en los carnavales, nos habla de una ruptura con el orden preestablecido. Se mezcla, por así decirlo, lo que no es, con lo que “debe ser”. Este es, para Bajtín, el elemento más importante del carnaval. No se trata simplemente de romper las reglas, sino más bien de invertirlas. Esto resulta en una sátira o crítica de las mismas reglas y los parámetros sociales. Junto con ello, está el elemento de lo grotesco, de la burla. De ello se encargan los disfraces y máscaras, y las actitudes exageradas. Esto, por supuesto, también inscrito en la inversión de los parámetros sociales. Toda esta carga crítica generalmente se avoca también a la crítica de la hipocresía, por ejemplo: satirizar a algún personaje religioso por medio de un disfraz que represente algo moralmente opuesto a lo que éste personaje debería representar, significa exhibir y condenar su hipocresía.

Estos elementos son muy importantes, pero tal vez mucho más importantes que ellos es el efecto que producen. En el carnaval, cada quien es libre de ser a su modo, libre de expresar su descontento con la sociedad, de dejar oír su voz y lo que quiera expresar. Y todo ello de una forma única, idiosincrásica, en plena libertad individual. Esto lleva al elemento más importante del carnaval: el sentimiento de familiaridad. En el carnaval, en el momento en el que éste se lleva a cabo, todos los participantes son uno mismo, todos son *el carnaval*. Son cómplices dentro de su pequeña representación del mundo, dentro de su pequeño universo donde las cosas no son como *son*, sino como ellos quisieran que fueran. Los parámetros preestablecidos se eliminan, las jerarquías desaparecen, las diferencias se desvanecen, y por ese efímero momento, todos son iguales, todos son una gran familia. Este es el sentimiento que se logra en la celebración de un carnaval, no solo la complicidad, sino la familiaridad. Todos están juntos, son parte del mismo mundo y al mismo tiempo saben que el mundo fuera del carnaval es distinto, por eso se saben unidos en una



gran familia carnavalesca que los envuelve y separa del mundo real por unos momentos.

¿Que la Marcha LGBTTT se ha convertido en un carnaval? Sí, definitivamente. ¿Que eso la degrada? En absoluto. ¿Quién que haya ido a alguna marcha, no se ha sentido realmente empático, unido a sus compañeros marchantes, cuando algún curioso los mira con horror o les grita algún insulto? En la marcha, todos somos uno, unidos para caminar con la frente en alto sin importar la hostilidad del medio. Lo que nos une nos hace fuertes, y el carnaval definitivamente coopera para este sentimiento de unidad.

Ahora es el momento en el que yo me pregunto ¿podría haber una mejor manera para que la comunidad LGBTTT se manifestase, que no fuera el carnaval? Una comunidad diversa, heterogénea, marginada, discriminada, estigmatizada, estereotipada, cuyo único punto en común es el deseo de amar libremente, en una forma distinta a la convencional. Esta comunidad, que desea que los parámetros se abran, que las normas no los condenen, que los incluyan, que desea ejercer su libertad ¿no acaso debe expresar su descontento con crítica, sátira, burla, libre expresión?, ¿no acaso debe expresarse mediante un acto de festividad diversa, alegría bulliciosa, pues no habla de guerras ni hambrunas, sino de la libertad de amar?

Sin embargo, la comunidad LGBTTT es diversa, mucho más diversa que lo que cabe en el carnaval, y por lo tanto habrá quienes creen que manifestarse de ese modo no se apega a sus ideologías. Por supuesto, esta postura es igual de válida que cualquier otra. Sin embargo, antes de condenar al carnaval como algo frívolo y banal, primero habrá que reflexionar sobre su trasfondo y consistencia. A fin de cuentas, el carnaval no es para todos, sólo para los disidentes festivos.

## El recorrido de derechos civiles: Inteligibilidad lesbiana y lucha política

**Gabriela Robledo**

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Para comenzar esta charla quisiera presentarme como lesbiana feminista y activista. Esto es importante porque a lo largo del debate intentaré una crítica de concepciones que se manejan en la actualidad dentro de ciertos sectores del feminismo y de las organizaciones GLTTBI (de gays, lesbianas, bisexuales, travestís, transgéneros e intersex). Mi foco estará puesto en la visibilidad lesbiana como presupuesto de existencia e inteligibilidad política, para avanzar hacia la categoría de ciudadanas, entendida como la titularidad de derechos y posibilidad de su ejercicio. El propósito de este trabajo es plantear la discusión que subyace a la lucha por derechos civiles de las lesbianas.

**Disyuntiva entre Estado y ciudadanía lésbica.** Desde un sector del activismo lésbico que encuentra un paralelo con las feministas autónomas, ha surgido cierto cuestionamiento a las organizaciones GLTTBI por promover críticamente algunos derechos civiles, como el matrimonio, el derecho de herencia, etc., con marcada tendencia asimilacionista. Este cuestionamiento no parte de considerar estas necesidades como ilegítimas, sino que, para modificar las bases mismas de la exclusión, resulta imprescindible abrir el juego a preguntas sobre la existencia de las personas para luego reconocerles derechos. Quien virtualmente *no existe* no tiene derechos ni puede formar parte de ningún pacto civil y si eventualmente se le reconocen algunos derechos, la vulnerabilidad social permanece intacta. Me pregunto en este sentido: ¿cuales vidas existen?, ¿cómo se puede reconstruir la existencia?, ¿cómo se relaciona la violencia con la invisibilidad?, ¿es la invisibilidad condición de la violencia?

Para este análisis llamaremos ciudadanía a la conformación de sujetos con la posibilidad de ejercicio de los derechos que el estado le reconoce y garantiza. El estado liberal y su discurso jurídico y médico, ha positivizado en sus primeras fórmulas desventajas cívicas en detrimento de las mujeres, naturalizando las desigualdades de género, concentrando los derechos civiles en la figura del pater familia, y jerarquizando el placer masculino por medio de la dominación y control del cuerpo femenino, su comportamiento sexual y la reproducción. En ese marco surgieron modernamente todas las restricciones a la ciudadanía civil de las mujeres, como la prohibición de votar hasta mediados del siglo pasado, la imposición de seguir el domicilio del marido como si fuera el suyo, los conceptos de dote y la representación del marido en los asuntos públicos como portavoz de los intereses familiares.

En un segundo momento y a partir sobretudo de tratados internacionales,

el Estado empieza a considerar, al menos formalmente, a las mujeres como sujetos abstractos con derechos universales. Si bien esto ha significado un gran avance para la ciudadanía de las mujeres, no resuelve los obstáculos de la desigualdad de género porque el Estado ideológicamente mantiene premisas e dominación masculina.

Estas leyes liberales promocionan derechos *de las mujeres* con un sentido universalista y por lo tanto invisibilizante de *otras mujeres*, a quienes no intentan asegurar ningún derecho. Evidentemente me refiero a aquellas que por sus relaciones interpersonales no están ligadas a un hombre, un esposo con el cual medirse para llegar al ansiado 50-50 en términos de derechos de familia y civiles. Ciertamente estas leyes beneficiosas para *las mujeres*, no beneficiaron por igual a las lesbianas.

La lucha por los derechos de las mujeres y los análisis de género en los términos que se han venido trabajando, no tienden a asegurar los derechos de las lesbianas porque *mujeres* como categoría, es un significante vacío que se ha completado en base a la naturalización del binario hombre-mujer: donde dice MUJERES en las leyes, en las políticas públicas, y hasta en gran medida en las reivindicaciones feministas, DEBE LEERSE MUJERESHETEROSEXUALES. Si asociamos el factor, la invisibilización y en segundo término, la subsunción de las lesbianas dentro de la categoría de mujeres, resultan factores que entran en colisión con el objetivo del acceso a la ciudadanía de las lesbianas.

**La invisibilidad lésbica.** Políticamente, para ser inteligibles, las lesbianas nos englobamos dentro de la categoría mujeres, aunque la pongamos epistemológica y ontológicamente bajo sospecha. La definición de *mujer* construida por los discursos hegemónicos, asume como condición de existencia jurídica la relación heterosexual subordinada al varón. Una consecuencia es la cristalización del cuerpo en un lugar de reproducción material y simbólica. Las políticas públicas se derivan como respuesta a esta concepción de mujer. Una de las estrategias que tienen las lesbianas para visibilizarse e intentar *existir*, es utilizar el término lesbiana en sentido político, vale decir, escapando de toda connotación esencialista o de alguna quimérica naturaleza anterior, sino mas bien como posibilidad de crítica frente un paisaje heterocentrista.

Voy a hacer foco primeramente en la violencia ontológica, bajo la cual se ordena normativamente quienes son los cuerpos humanos calificados para convertirse en sujetos de derechos a partir del dato de sus relaciones sexuales y afectivas, y la sugerencia de que ésta definición restrictiva de lo humano es la base misma de la exclusión.

Monique Wittig (1978) desafía la construcción cultural mujer para encontrar una sujeta lesbiana. La lesbiana, como condición de su existencia civil, debe "aprobar" ciertos pactos de heteronormatividad que en realidad determinan el modo de producción y transmisión del conocimiento que a su vez, la invisibilizan. Estos pactos son constitutivos de una sociedad donde el binario hombre-mujer está naturalizado y es necesario para asegurarse

legitimidad y coherencia sexual y por lo tanto, social. Pactos que excluyen a las sexualidades no heterosexuales que se cristalizan en instituciones como el matrimonio, que operan como productores y reproductores de la heterosexualización totalizante.

Existe cierto consenso en definir “presunción heterosexista” como la presunción de que todo el mundo es heterosexual, hasta que demuestre o se demuestre lo contrario. Esto contribuye a reforzar la concepción de “hecho natural” de la heterosexualidad y la consiguiente invisibilización y fobia hacia las sexualidades disidentes de esta presunción, que opera como norma.

De modo que la lesbiana, aunque pueda ser leída como mujer no es *la mujer* de los códigos civiles porque esta *es* en relación a un varón. Así, debido al mecanismo de invisibilización, la lesbiana permanece *camuflada* dentro del ropaje de la presunción de heterosexualidad obligatoria y en una lectura totalizante de los cuerpos, se subsumen los modos de subjetividad, intereses, etc., de las lesbianas dentro de la categoría hegemónica *mujeres* y se las considera incluida dentro de sus términos, lo cual vuelve irreal su existencia. Por lo tanto, el menoscabo de los derechos civiles, económicos, y culturales que se infringe a las lesbianas, no suscita mayores reclamos de reparación desde el momento que por definición se trata de sujetos inexistentes y por lo tanto sin derechos. Quien no existe no tiene derechos.

Pero el problema parece no agotarse en la inexistencia de un discurso que incluya a las personas con una orientación sexual y expresión de género no hegemónicas. Existe una frontera ideológica para la inteligibilidad humana, una línea que demarca cómo son y deben ser los humanos y humanas.

El lesbianismo, tanto en su dimensión sexual como en su dimensión política, desborda la categoría de género, la excede, la sobrepasa. Este *exceso* se explica porque la categoría de género descansa dialécticamente en el binomio varón-mujer. La mujer encerrada en el binomio no es la lesbiana, por más esfuerzos de analogía que intentemos. El género, como *locus*, se debilita como categoría llave para explicar y promover los derechos de las mujeres que no tienen como contrapunto de su existencia a un varón.

De esto da cuenta el doloroso y persistente enfrentamiento de gran parte de los movimientos de mujeres y feministas con los colectivos de lesbianas. Más allá de que estas últimas, trabajen y defiendan cada una de las consignas propuestas, me pregunto por qué muchas veces son invisibilizadas por sus propias compañeras.

Cuando las lesbianas rompen el silencio, ¿cómo es que frente a sus reivindicaciones siempre se priorizan otras en la agenda feminista? Por ejemplo, en temas de salud, dadas las diferentes prácticas sexuales no siempre hay identidad entre las reivindicaciones de las mujeres heterosexuales y de las lesbianas, porque el significado de salud no es totalmente asimilable en uno u otro caso. Sucede, por ejemplo, que la presunción de heterosexualidad opera fundacionalmente en la medicina donde hay falta de información sobre las



formas de protección para evitar la transmisión de infecciones de transmisión sexual (ITS) en las relaciones lésbicas.

**Un aspecto emergente: El postulado del llamado matrimonio.** Como una manifestación liberal normalizadora, reforzada por la prensa, nos encontramos con el siguiente tipo de falsa dicotomía: ¿quieren las lesbianas el matrimonio? Porque, entérense, las feministas *heterosexuales* ya no lo quieren. ¿Cómo se entiende el reclamo de los movimientos GLTTBI por el reconocimiento de tales derechos civiles? ¿En las reivindicaciones de los derechos civiles de las lesbianas hay una intención cómplice y solapada de querer formar parte de estas instituciones? ¿Negociarán las lesbianas el sentido emancipatorio de la divergencia sexual para figurar en los plexos civiles?

Sucede que debido a la distinta ubicación de la mujer (que se presume heterosexual) y la lesbiana, se reclaman derechos civiles según sus realidades, sin implicar ello dejar de cuestionar instituciones y discursos opresivos. No se trata por lo tanto de *querer el matrimonio* como planteo asimilacionista, aunque algunas organizaciones GLTTBI lo planteen en esos términos, se trata de mantener la cuerda tensa de una política donde las distintas sujetas puedan ser *leídas* y sus derechos civiles finalmente emerger.

**Transformación social: Horizontes de una ciudadanía radical.** El género es una manera de dividir el poder, la línea que se traza entre, por un lado varones en lo público y en el pensamiento abstracto, y mujeres en lo privado y en el pensamiento concreto. Esta división no es sólo de orden discursivo sino epistemológico, de manera que se demarcan los ámbitos de actuación de hombres y mujeres y cómo debe ser entendido lo humano. La construcción y apropiación de lo femenino en clave patriarcal asegura la vigencia de la institución de la *heterosexualidad obligatoria*, que otorga estabilidad y coherencia a la definición del sujeto *mujer* no sólo desde una perspectiva social o jurídica, sino justamente como sujeta enunciadora.

En el camino de construcción de la ciudadanía plena es de suma importancia repensar las reivindicaciones de manera crítica para no caer en la trampa asimilacionista y que no nos tapen el bosque de un cambio social radical. Una ciudadanía radical implica la existencia de normas de reconocimiento de lo humano donde las lesbianas puedan encuadrarse como ciudadanas reconocibles. Las normas de reconocimiento son esenciales para la constitución de lo humano, siempre que sea recíproco.

Cuando reconocemos a otro, cuando pedimos que se nos reconozca, no estamos en busca de otro que nos vea tal como somos, como ya somos, como siempre hemos sido. En lugar de ello, en el pedido de reconocimiento, en la demanda, nos volvemos ya algo nuevo; desde el momento en que nos constituimos a causa del llamado – un deseo y una necesidad *del Otro* – que tiene lugar en el lenguaje, sin el cual no podríamos existir (Butler 2005). Este reconocimiento recíproco, como condición de existencia opera validando la propia existencia por su valor *per se*.



Pedir reconocimiento u ofrecerlo significa instar un futuro en correlación y reciprocidad real con los otros. Como presupuesto de ciudadanía, los derechos reconocidos deben implicar libertad de toda coacción política y económica y de colonización. Esta aspiración busca maximizar la protección y la libertad, de todas las personas, incluidas en el concepto de persona las no heterosexuales y las transgéneros.

Es el desafío de los movimientos feministas articularse desde diversas transversalidades, como la raza, la clase, la orientación sexual, y la expresión de género, para lograr una *praxis* emancipatoria que tenga como destinataria a las humanas y humanos.

Mientras hombre siga siendo sinónimo de humanidad y mujeres sinónimo de mujeres heterosexuales, la promoción acrítica de la inclusión en un discurso hegemónico de personas con una orientación sexual y expresión de género disidente no resolverá el problema: El nudo gordiano de la exclusión ciudadana seguirá firmemente atado mientras sus presupuestos se mantengan.

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## A Controlled Experiment: my upstairs people

*Verónica Reyes*

Some people believe that I live beneath whiteness.  
 Some people believe that I live at the bottom of the rung.  
 Some people believe that I am living in the margins of darkness.  
 Some people believe that by living in a basement apartment  
 I am at the bottom level of this gleaming hierarchy  
 that I am at the pit of this hegemonic society.

But I believe that by living in this dank space  
 I am a spy for the revolutionist ideals of Che.  
 Better yet I am the butch Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz living among them

### My Upstairs People

Better yet I am the feminist learning how my upstairs people live.  
 I witness or better yet I hear the lives of white people.  
 Better yet I am the scholar researching my upstairs people  
 in their “natural” middle class surroundings for my next book.

And they, society, say Blacks, Latinos, Native people are “uncivilized”  
 that we run around wild like, like – those people over there on the other side  
 of the bridge on to Lansdowne off Dundas or up Keele near Lawrence  
 or down Finch near Jane, you know, like “those people” over there.  
 But I’ve come here to tell you that I have witnessed it.  
 I have heard how the white man and woman – the straight world – live.  
 The little white boy runs wild without a care.  
 He jumps, he screams, he slams, he groans at his parents  
 and they – white mom and dad – do nothing.  
 They let him run wild without any rules, without any respect.  
 I have witnessed it; I have spied on my upstairs people.

They are my experiment in a controlled environment.  
 A three-floor house across from a white elementary school  
 There are no metal fences holding in these kids  
 There is a wooden fence for décor  
 There are no bars on those black-tinted windows  
 There is beveled glass for mental stimulation  
 There are no electronic school bell sounds like prison  
 There is a handheld brass bell rung for clarity  
 I have witnessed firsthand knowledge how they live.  
 The little white boy knows he has the power of whiteness  
 The little white boy knows he has the privilege of maleness

The little white boy knows he has the prestige of class  
 The little white boy knows at age two  
 that he has potential for greatness.

Yet he behaves like a "wild child" without any manners.  
 Yet he behaves like a "wild child" who is uncivilized.  
 He represents everything that historically the white people claimed  
 that the Blacks, Latinos, and Native people were.  
 I am telling you that none of the things this little white boy does  
 could he get away with a Mexican dad, a Black mom.

We would not put up with such nonsense and rudeness.  
 We have manners for our elders.  
 We have respect for the people who rent apartments from us.  
 We tell our children, "Do not make too much noise,  
 you'll bother our tenant downstairs in the basement."  
 We understand the need for space we can call our own  
 even if it is a one-bedroom apartment basement with a loud furnace.  
 We know what space means to us:

It is precious  
 It is valuable  
 It is our hard work

We never sit there and say nothing to a child who is rude.  
 That child knows who is the elder and respects her or him.  
 How odd that we, Blacks, Latinos, Native people are labeled "uncivilized"  
 by this white establishment that is actually all those things  
 We are called and We in reality are not those things.

So in my basement apartment off Ronesvalles on the side of Marmaduke  
 I am a spy for the revolution.  
 I am studying how white people live in their surroundings.  
 I am Malintzin Tenepal plotting my firme plan.  
 I am the feminist Che Guevara listening to them.  
 I am la suave poeta, Lupe, aka la virgen, scribbling my notas.  
 I am the dyke Emiliano Zapata getting ready for the revolution.  
 I am the homegirl Adelita about to kick some chingón ass.  
 I am the Chicana Fidel Castro about to overthrow the govt.  
 I am not at the bottom rung of this white hierarchy.  
 I am not living on the margins of this discourse.

I am the voice for my people.  
 I am the Chicana feminist dyke ready for the revolution.

I am the revolutionist.

## Ética y buenas costumbres

*Patricia Karina Vergara Sánchez*

No es muy popular ser el duende verde que gruñe sobre el consumismo en navidad, mientras el resto de la comunidad cuelga adornos de papel y canta villancicos. La misma impopularidad e incomodidad con mis interlocutoras encuentro cada vez que abro la boca o la pluma para señalar la estructura consumista, de antro, embrutecimiento con alcohol, sexualidad cosificada y a veces con drogas, en que está sumergida la comunidad LGBTTyT. En mi preocupación personal y concreta: la enajenación de bar que nos toca a las lesbianas. Aclaro, antes que nada: lo cierto es que no detesto las fiestas, ni los bares, ni las bebidas alcohólicas, ni la socialización que ocurre en estos ambientes. Mil veces he aceptado con gusto uno o muchos tequilas, he organizado y asistido a fiestas. Creo en el ejercicio sexual libre, siempre y cuando sea responsable y consensuado. Incluso, sé y respeto del uso de sustancias que llevan a estados de conciencia alterada con fines rituales, espirituales, de búsqueda o simplemente experimentales.

Reconozco, cómo no hacerlo, la necesidad de espacios de convivencia, encuentro y de celebración para ésta comunidad. Sin embargo, estas notas son un llamado a preguntarse, desde el hacerlésbico politizado, a preguntarnos sobre la naturaleza y fondo de las relaciones y organizaciónlésbica alrededor de esta forma mercantil de socialización-alienación. Por ejemplo, cuestionamos nuestras relaciones de pareja y criticamos con dureza la imitación del modelo heterosexual en donde, por desgracia, hay quien asume el papel dominante y otra que acepta el de sometida y se repiten los roles ya conocidos. Como respuesta, las lesbianas somos capaces de criticar, aportar y encontramos que no necesariamente tenemos por qué imitar dicho modelo. También podemos cuestionar y replantearnos las formas en que nos relacionamos como comunidad, de divertirnos o de espacios de ocio y a partir de la reflexión crítica hacer tambalear el modelo que se nos dió prefabricado.

Podemos establecer, para comenzar, que el sumergirnos en **la mercadotecnia de la diversidad y la lógica del antro** nos enajena, es decir, nos aleja de nosotras mismas e impide la búsqueda de objetivos comunes. Nos sometemos a la patriarcal imposición de valores y, entre el humo y la oscuridad de estos sitios, competimos para ver quién tiene más poder económico, belleza física, quién tiene más encuentros o conquistas sexuales, quien bebe más, quién tiene mejor auto, quién es más que...

Claro que ello ocurre también en los ambientes homosexuales, heterosexuales y en general. Y también valdría la pena la discusión al respecto. Sin embargo, sujetándonos a hablar de nosotras, lesbianas, habrá que pensar en las oportunidades valiosas que nos estamos negando. Qué pasaría si arrojáramos la copa y la mercantilización al cesto de la basura y pudiésemos



comenzar a percibirnos entre nosotras como aliadas, acercarnos, invitarnos a reflexionar en conjunto, apreciarnos por nuestros valores intrínsecos y quién sabe, tal vez poder organizarnos en acciones concertadas, por ejemplo, para apoyar a aquella que han corrido de casa, exigir justicia jurídica, alentar a la que padece, crear grupos de trabajo intelectual, artístico o político, que hoy ciertamente en México existen apenas un par como tales.

No se trata simplemente de un planteamiento soñador, si no de una invitación para comenzar a buscarnos opciones de vida y de acción tanto política como cotidiana distintas a las que ya nos han sido dadas. El fenómeno de la generación que hoy vive el año 2008 es el de la era del desencanto. Los gurús, los guías, las grandes teorías científicas o divinas transformadoras quedaron en los siglos pasados. Parece demasiado lejana la promesa de un orden mejor o más justo. Para las mujeres que hemos sido negadas en nuestros aportes por los libros de historia, alejadas sistemáticamente del poder y despojadas de nosotras mismas, el vacío es mayor. Así pues, respiramos a diario desencanto, cinismo, falta de solidaridad para con el otro y con la otra. De tal modo que las únicas dos premisas posibles son las impuestas desde el poder: El valor del dinero como fuente de toda satisfacción y el embotamiento de los sentidos. Como el orden económico establecido garantiza que el dinero y sus posibilidades son inaccesibles para la mayoría, entonces nos volcamos a la segunda premisa: le apostamos a la evasión contra la acción y jugamos a no mirar, a conformarnos con lo que hay.

Cuando la ansiedad psíquica, la insatisfacción o la soledad comienzan a pesar demasiado, una de las posibles salidas es ir a gastar 30 pocos pesos en tres cervezas y calificamos como mejor que cuestionar el por qué no existen otros sitios, otras prácticas y otros servicios o inventarlos nosotras mismas. Preferimos no ver la violencia que nos cerca o conformarnos con saber que ya estaba ahí, en lugar de tomar la parte de responsabilidad que nos toca y comenzar a hacer, a proponer, a transformar en lo inmediato.

Tenemos que aprender a reconocer que el poder comprar un juguete sexual, ver una película porno, o la posibilidad de ligar a alguien en un bar y terminar en la cama sin conocer siquiera su nombre, no son reivindicaciones ni constituyen ninguna liberación sexual, si no que son formas efectivas que los empresarios han encontrado para comercializar con nuestra sexualidad. Y que, de paso, nos exponen a las infecciones de transmisión sexual.

Más aún, pareciera que el movimiento lesbiano tuviese por única demanda política que no le cierren el bar donde se amontonan las jovencitas los domingos. Y en la miopía de los ejemplos anteriores nos quedamos tomando una cervecita y mirando bailar a la de enfrente mientras nos sonríe y el grupito de amigas compite con el grupito de al lado. Así, fuerzas de lesbianas que podrían ser transformadoras, se convierten en masas embrutecidas y nada más.

Son los negocios en general, bares, antros y discotecas de la mercantilización de la diversidad sexual, medios efectivos de despolitización al servicio del orden actual. Si fuesen contestatarios o su existencia tuviera un peso político



de importancia, como los empresarios pretenden hacernos creer, entonces serían perseguidos y no tan fácilmente existirían en número creciente, como ocurre. Aclaremos: el mercado rosa tiene un peso pero económico y su interés político no es de transformación. Si existiese un cambio político, jurídico y social, ya no serían necesarios bares, viajes turísticos, revistas especializadas, ni lugares sólo de ambiente. Terminada la necesidad de sitios exclusivos rosas, se acaba la gallina de los huevos de oro. Por ello, estas empresas son, sirviendo a sus propios intereses, un medio efectivo de control y nada más.

No se trata de censurar a nadie ni de erigirse en las guardianas de la moral y las buenas costumbres. Es cuestión de ética, rebeldía y el sueño de nuevas costumbres en donde el alcoholismo, la drogadicción, las infecciones de transmisión sexual y la apatía política no fuesen una realidad cotidiana que le pasa a muchas de nosotras. Es posible, muy posible que sea de otra forma. Si las lesbianas somos humanas capaces de haber roto con la orden de heterosexualidad que se nos dio desde niñas y nos atrevimos a amar y a erotizar a nuestra manera y desde otros principios, ¿por qué no habríamos de atrevernos a arrebatarle nuestro espacio lúdico y de encuentro al orden existente que nos somete.?

Hagamos un día de campo con manzanas y comida deliciosa hecha en casa, reunamos a 200 lesbianas para pintar un mural que hable de nosotras, lancemos globos al cielo desde un árbol nada más por la alegría de encontrarnos y hacer cosas y estar vivas, llevemos a nuestros hijos e hijas de paseo todos juntos para ir retomando las conciencias colectivas, construyamos una escuela rural entre todas, vayamos a nadar, alfabeticémonos unas a otras, enseñémonos a arreglar autos, computadoras, qué se yo. Es posible, lo sé, encontrarnos, construirnos, crear identidad desde una historia distinta a la ya contada, desde una historia escrita a nuestra propia tinta. ¿Por qué no atrevernos?



María sang  
& climbed all inside me  
Shattered the nice steel walls I'd built around me  
Her voice ... dulce como la guayaba  
Her powerful medicine cured the fears/the sickness  
That comes from too many years of playing too many games  
With just one "La lo le ... la lo le lo lai"  
She sang away the aluminum city madness  
And planted La Bandera & a palm tree in my soul  
Made me jump up & dance myself well  
(Aiiiiiii María ... la voz que tu tienes)

La voz que tiene María  
Me vuelve media loca  
Me da la felicidad sin fin  
It haunts me & heals me  
And makes me very, very proud de ser Boricua

## Sargento Josanna Jeffrey

*Dinapiera Di Donato*

Gritos en el horno  
¿ no es Janis Joplin?  
no son conciertos para muñecas suicidas

ponte a salvo  
ven

Un año en Irak no es mucho tiempo  
Josanna mía mi aliento de bambú

Robaría a Josanna Jeffrey  
para el tiempo que nos queda en tus brazos

breves humedales de Mesopotamia  
Josanna Jeffrey con sus piernas sedosas  
mitones de lujo negro

es la Ibis sagrada  
en la mira

Temo la ponzoña del tatuaje  
en un cerebro de Caballero del Stormfront  
al acecho

Josanna Jeffrey mi centinela de trenzas escarchadas  
más bella que Central Park en invierno  
tatuado de azafrán  
firmado Christo

la noche de Nínive bajo su casco de guerra  
vas a necesitar las uñas  
que dejas en mi cama

el cielo de Irak te proteja

El cielo de Irak para saltar de su rama  
justo a tiempo

en el fuego amigo  
caballero armado del Ku klux klan por internet  
cuida la manzanilla de su vello ario  
cuando nadie lo ve

las bajas destripadas de vello oscuro  
corren de su cuenta

Huelo la ponzoña de sus ritos de baja intensidad

Voltea  
Salta  
Josanna Jeffrey

Eres negra eres el cielo de los reyes  
reina de Bagdad mi novia del Bronx

ruido de la caña los ojos de bengala quebrada

Josanna Jeffrey dispara primero

ven

amo sus riñones preciosos  
perdidos  
en un experimento de Basora  
días calientes lamiendo entre tus piernas  
en un descansador de pantalla  
helada

como una quemadura de Mosul

Vuelo de bambú doblado  
tu aliento de violetas de menstruante  
Josanna Jeffrey  
perdió el interés de la industria farmacéutica  
Tus riñones de treinta mil dólares  
tus violetas  
nada

enroscada en el descansador de pantalla  
como en un vientre  
descansa en mí

lamo la flecha agujeteada sobre mi corazón  
te doy de mamar  
toda la pornografía que hemos hecho  
para poner los delicados paraísos  
a salvo

carne amada putrefacta  
se abraza al polvo de 10.000 sitios arqueológicos



destilados de violetas  
irrepetibles  
para extraer  
tres gotas de aceite

ese animal  
suelto en un libro de monja  
un dedo de mi pie  
en tu apertura de bambú

cómo te gustaba

dijo que al volver tendría una hija  
Nasiriya

tampoco volvieron las aves

para retenerte me juego  
la carta Josanna Jeffrey:  
érase una vez las amantes  
perdidas  
en fuegos amistosos que declaran  
la guerra de cada quien

las sobrevivientes las felices infelices muchachas  
arrasadas devueltas de reyes recién muertos un año después

gritos en el horno

retiras la cabeza  
como un pavo dorado  
que todavía  
hay que punzar

Josanna Jeffrey

sin pena ni gloria

no vienes

la última cerilla  
es para la oscuridad

## Mi Abuelita's Café

*Anel I. Flores*

“¿Algo pa' tomar?”

“Café y agua, with little ice, por favor.” This restaurant is one of the very last that still refries their beans the real way, in the bacon drippings. I respect the cook, aquí, more than those earthy pochos in Las Alamo Heights. They gave into the health kick, soy, wheat tortilla, black-bean-bullshit. Mi Abuelita's Café upholds San Antonio's fat-city reputation, the second fattest city in the u.s. The weight problem, *of course, isn't* related to the fact that San Antonio is painted with poverty; people who can only afford processed food products, with absolutely no nutrition. And, it has *nothing* to do with the lack of health and physical education in the public schools, or the fact that half the children don't speak the language of their teachers.

Chavela, the cook, and also the owner, was named after La Chavela Vargas. She tells me the story every time I come in.

“La Señora Vargas. ¡Ay, Ay, Ay! A mamasita, mi'ja,” she'd howl, with her eyes looking towards the sky, at a memory. “A singer, Chit, Con Corazón, Famosa, La First Lesbiana,” all in one breath. “Y, mami, chee'd chow up, chula, I mean chulísima, on a chiny, steel-framed Moto to her Chows! ¡Hijo! And Che always had a different novia, a new girl at every Chow, una blondie, flaquita y bonita, riding on the back of her bike. This was in the fordies, mi'ja, before you were even in the stars.” She held the singer responsible for her soltera lifestyle. “Es La Señora Vargas, it's why I'm here mi'ja, why every chula wants me. Can't deny 'em, es por La Chavela!” Her hand was in the air by this part of the speech. Chavela loves her gorditas, different from La Chavela Vargas; with a nice sized pansita, or pansota in my case, which is why I make sure to eat just enough taquitos, enough to catch an extra long stare from her cigarette-ash-colored eyes. I like to keep my skin puffy and soft for the mamasitas. They lean on me and talk about the 15-year-olds from the night before at the club who can't even dance, and they talk about their last vieja who went psycho and broke in their car window, or they tell the latest Chisme of La Yleana from the old bar, who looks bien buena on her law firm's billboard near the Josephine St. exit. The chulas like to lean on me and talk, and I like the girls to have a lot to talk about.

My cup is already empty y La Soltera swings around the counter to cure my cravings. Chavela has the Mexican Curandera, palm-reading, removing ojo, clairvoyant gift. She is the one all the neighborhood viejas come to for answers as to why their sons never came back after the army took them, and why each of their utilities are turning off one by one while their bills keep getting higher and higher. The old women come in lines, one at a time, after the

two o'clock lunch rush, wrapped up in head scarves and pearl button blouses.

"Dios," I accidentally say outloud and she passes by; my brain's response to her body moving in the same rippling waves as the coffee swishing back and forth against the walls of the cup.

"¿Más café, mi'ja?"

She calls me mi'ja, her little girl, and I look up into her eyes hoping she is reading my purposely-upturned palms that must scream, "I love you!" in their lines. I lift my eyebrows and smile shyly without showing any teeth. Her squinting eyes and questioning smile ask me, "¿Quieres ser mi chica?" I speak again, under my breath, when she is far away enough to not hear me. "I'll be your girl, cuando cierre la tienda." I am chicken-shit; all talk and no do. If I go to the back, where she has the pots of boiling caldo de res and de pollo, I bet she would be alone. No one is allowed to touch her caldo, because it is her specialty, named after her abuela, Caldo María Olivia. The bowl she serves Caldo María can hold a globo, like the polka-dotted ones they sell in the Jardín Central en Zacatecas, but instead holds clear potatoes, whole carrots, a cabbage half, either the pata of the pollo or pétano of a fist-size piece of beef, with a thick white stream of steam rising from its edge. Just thinking about her stirring and cutting the ingredients create a spicy smell in my nose, making me salivate and close my eyes.

The perfect amount of daydreaming time passes in between Chavela's hands hovering over me to refill my porcelain cup and her slow motion walk, mesmerizing my eyes, to the kitchen.

Now, my coffee is the perfect temperature for my tongue.

## Yolanda the Terrible (1947-2007)

*Alicia Gaspar de Alba*

A Yolanda le decían la terrible  
Porqué mostraba una mirada de rifle;  
Pocos pelos en la lengua tenía  
Y hasta en pleitos con amigas se metía.

Decían que era dura y sin corazón  
Pero muchos conocían su ternura;  
A los libros amaba con pasión,  
Animalitos salvaba con locura.  
Separatista y amante de mujeres  
Muchas novias atraía con sus poderes.  
Caballera y respetuosa de palabras  
Buena de humor pero macha con las cabras.

A su biblioteca todos dejaba entrar  
Menos los que traían comida en la mano;  
“A mis libros ni una mancha quiero encontrar,  
O les meto una patada en el ano.”

Tumultosa y llena de ilusiones  
Peleaba por la justicia sin condiciones.  
A veces la tristeza la traicionaba,  
A las lesbianas cómo diosas honraba.

Ahora lucha la Yoli con su Catrina  
Pa’ abrir las puertas del cielo a las sobrinas  
De escritoras, trabajadoras, y artistas –  
Todas de una forma u otra feministas.

Doctora, ya con martillo o con pluma,  
Con botones comunicaba sus verdades.  
Astróloga, consejera, y hasta bruja  
De repente se nos fué entre los petates.

Adiosa, amiga muy de aquellas  
De tus estudiantes, admiradoras, y colegas.  
No te olvidamos ni tampoco tus lecciones  
Que te acompañe Catrina y sus canciones.



*Yolanda Retter Vargas at UCLA  
by Angela Brinskele Nov 2006*

## a butterfly

*Rose M. Santos-Cunningham*

some day in our lives we may meet a butterfly  
a butterfly that has just begun to open her wings  
a butterfly that has bloomed with colors so bright  
a butterfly that has touched our lives  
she has taken flight and must find her place in life  
but how we want to take her there  
to be with her  
to share with her the wonders of life  
and yet we know that she alone must find  
that place where she may ascend  
and we let go  
one day that butterfly may return  
with her colors so bright  
to call to us that she has returned  
to tell us of her travels  
to tell us she loves the person that not long ago  
told her to spread her wings and see the world  
and we wait for her return  
we wait for the spring to see the butterfly come home



## Renacimiento de una bruja

*Zemaya Martínez*

I was trying to see  
I was trying to feel  
I was in a fog  
and suffocating  
I was gasping for breath...

And then, I felt You  
All around me  
And then I could hear You  
All inside me, and then

I was able to Breathe, again  
I Remembered  
I Remember, yo recuerdo

Esta Ofrenda es para ustedes

You called me back to you thirty years ago  
And I Remembered

Our Ways, Your Ways  
Mi Madre Sagrada  
Our Agreement  
My Spirit becomes Breath  
As you fashion me like You

Seeds and Blood  
Inhale and Exhale  
Ether and Soil  
El casamiento del verdadero Amor

We know this as children  
All of the Love, All of the Knowledge  
Seen and Unseen Medicines  
The Gourd is full  
Gold and Brilliant...

Madre, que ha pasado  
What is this rigid cloth on your soil  
Where are your trees  
Where are your rivers  
Your lakes, your animales  
What is this

We were running and running  
I was running  
A big hairy man, a boy my age  
I hide... in the shadow of the Rock Ones  
What now  
I disappeared  
Millions of us disappeared  
Killed, raped, tortured, enslaved, kidnapped  
Babies, Women, Men

My Language  
My Prayers

I feel You, I hear You

I hear You as the Wind  
I drink You as the Water  
I feel You as the Fire  
You hold me as the Earth

We are still here  
Our cord is invisible  
They cannot see it  
cannot cut it  
Cannot cut the Codes  
That link us

Look at us  
We are all around  
We share our Breath with You  
You share your Breath with us

Grandmothers, Grandfathers  
I Remember, yo recuerdo  
My Heart is Open  
My Ears are Open

My Eyes are Open  
My Hands are Open

Esta Ofrenda es para ustedes

Y los ancianos, the Ancient Ones  
Wrapped her in a Rebozo of Stars  
As her dream began to wake

She was on a road  
Going to the Hill  
To Remember how to fly

The Buck crossed her path  
And it was not afraid  
She wondered why  
It heard her thoughts  
“I know that you are in your Dream  
where will this path be taking you”

I am going to the Hill  
To Remember how to fly

And the Buck said,  
“I’ll take you there”  
So she climbed  
Up on it’s back...  
Then came a Snake  
Of white and brown  
Scent of earth and grasses  
This lightening bolt began to speak  
“I’ve been waiting for you  
on this path  
I’m part  
Of your Dream  
A Grandmother awaits you  
On the Hill  
To introduce you  
To the Sky”

So along we went  
Buck, Snake and I  
At the Crossroads

Was a Horse

“It’s this way to the Hill  
the Old One sweeps the Path for you”

How do they know about my Dream

The Horse gave her

A bit of it’s tail

And the Buck began to speak

“Follow this trail between those two trees  
you will get to Blue Heron Lake

Snake will go with you

To the edge of the forest

Then your memory will guide you from there”

When they got to the Lake

The Snake whispered “Stop!”

The Blue Heron met my gaze

As it began to dissolve

I felt my Self Shift

Moving

In the direction of the Hill

I was greeted by Rabbit

With an abundant Nature

“This is the Way”

The Path is Clear

I enter the Labyrinth

I knew I was Home

With all of the eyes of the Forest

Lighting my steps

My Dream became more Awake

The Trees stood in motion

With the Moon as my Witness

My Blood began to flow

Grandmother held me and

Brushes me with leaves and

Danced the Smoke all around me

I cried when she kissed

My eyes and said

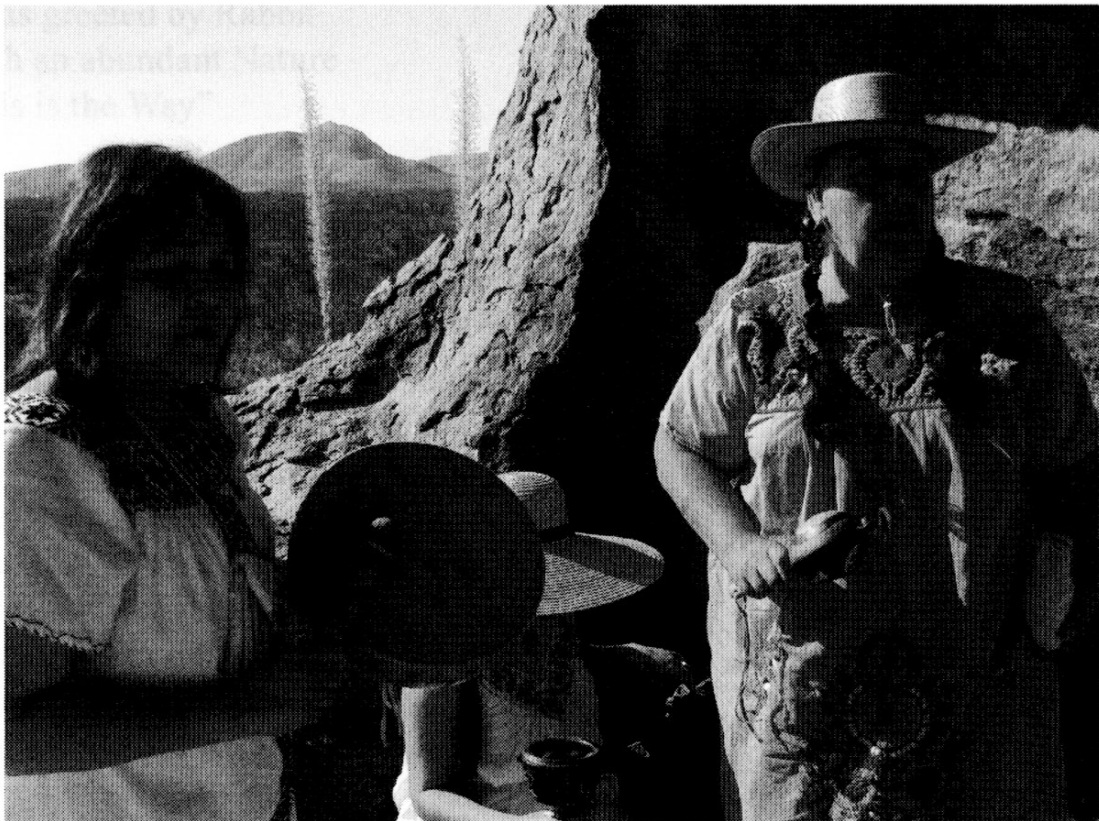
We are always with you  
Soar and Fly to the Sun and  
Remember this Love is your Power  
Remember this Love is your Name  
As many others take flight with you now  
You will gather and grow  
As you share what comes through  
These codes that come from the Stars

Your Dream is Awake  
Our Dream is Awake  
As the Portal opens wide

Thank you Sacred Earth  
Thank you Sacred Sky  
For piercing through my illusions

As I now Remember my Prayer

Esta Ofrenda is para Ustedes



*Songs of the Elders by Lucía Martínez*



## Reencarnaremos

*Camila*

Querrán azorarnos  
con su sarcástica risa,  
querrán pulverizarnos  
con sus palabras insanas,  
querrán crucificarnos  
cual repugnantes ladrones.  
Nos lanzarán piedras,  
escupitajos, nos darán  
muerte a macanazos,  
a balazos, torturándonos...  
Más reencarnaremos.  
No nos extinguiremos.  
Estamos y estaremos  
en todos lados,  
con la cabeza erguida,  
pues somos obra digna,  
inspiración divina.  
En tanto ustedes,  
ignorantes, escépticos,  
reptantes, seguirán  
arrastrándose entre  
su escorial mentira.

## Contributors' Notes

**Mercedes Alba:** Es originaria de Guadalajara, Jalisco. Egresada de Litteralia, ha publicado en periódicos y revistas de México y Estados Unidos de América. Participó en el libro colectivo *Calendario de Palabras* (CECA, Jalisco, 1992) y en la antología *Verbo Cirio III*, de Patricia Medina (2004). En el año 2000 publicó los poemarios *Informe de retirada y Exilios*. Activista en pro de los derechos humanos de las mujeres y las niñas desde 1987, creadora del – Tendedero en Contra de la Violencia – ¡¡¡Vivan Las Niñas!!!

**Nelsy Aldebot Reyes:** Es profesora y desarrolla trabajo de género en la Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo (UASD). Es también terapeuta holística, maestra de reiki, loba, ciguapa, mariposa y muchas cosas más. Ha publicado dos libros: *Belleza y Fortaleza: Caminos hacia el empoderamiento, Apuntes sobre metodología para el trabajo con mujeres* y *Éxtasis Mágico*.

**Erika Almenara:** Nació en Lima, Perú, un 7 de mayo de 1978. Estudió Traducción e interpretación en la UNIFE y Literatura en la Pontificia Universidad Católica. Ha publicado el poemario *Reino Cerrado* (Santo Oficio, 2006). Vive en Cajamarca.

**Odette Alonso:** Nació en Santiago de Cuba (1964). Es poeta, narradora y ensayista. Su cuaderno *Insomnios en la noche del espejo* obtuvo el Premio Internacional de Poesía “Nicolás Guillén” (1999). Ha publicado 12 poemarios en Cuba, México, Estados Unidos y España. Odisea Editorial publicó su primer libro de relatos, *Con la boca abierta* (Madrid, 2006). Reside desde 1992 en México.

**Janette Álvarez:** I identify as a Xicana Lesbian Feminist. I was born and raised in Los Angeles but, as many people, moved to the Bay Area for a purpose I didn't know then but know now. I have been living in San Francisco for seven years. Currently, I attend San Francisco State, working on my Masters. I am 24 years old, un Pisces.

**Rosita Ángulo Libre de Marulanda:** was born in Colombia, South America, and lives in New York City. She writes vignettes of the mosaic that is her life.

**Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa** (1942-2004): was a Chicana, sixth-generation tejana, lesbian feminist writer, poet, scholar, activist, and cherished friend. She was the author of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) (named one of the 100 Best Books of the Century by Hungry Mind Review and Utne Reader), *Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado* (1993), *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/ Prietita y la Llorona* (1995), and *Interviews/Entrevistas* (2000) (with Ana Louise Keating). Gloria edited *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists-of-Color* (1990) and co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) (with Cherríe Moraga) and *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (2002) (with Ana Louise Keating). Gloria's awards included the Before Columbus Foundation American Book Award, the Lambda Lesbian Small Book Press Award, a National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Award, the Lesbian Rights Award, the Sappho Award of Distinction, and the American

Studies Association Lifetime Achievement Award. Gloria's published and unpublished works form part of the Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin. Her collection of spiritual objects is housed by the Special Collections Department of the University Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz. (Source: Wikipedia)

**Renée (Stephens) Araña:** has her Masters Degree in American Studies from University of New Mexico. I am an Admissions Counselor and Lecturer in the Raza Studies Department at San Francisco State University. My Abuela from Colima, Mexico died a few days after I first kissed a woman. My queer cousin who lives in West Hollywood loves that story. I was born in Daly City, California. I live in San Francisco, California. I am a mix of Mexican, Portuguese and white.

**Cathy Arellano:** is a Mission (San Pancho, Caliphs) native who likes to write poems, essays, and stories about growing up brown, coming out queer, and living as true as she can which is kind of crooked. She is on an extended visit to Burque, Nuevo México where she is teaching whatever they let her at Central New Mexico Community College and the University of New Mexico.

**Lea E. Arellano:** is a southwestern Chicana Indígena butch dyke living in the Bay Area for 27 years. By day she is a spirit&compassion based social profit consultant and trainer ([www.human-solutions.us](http://www.human-solutions.us)). By night a lover, a mexi dancing rock and roller musician, vocalist and extreme optimist!

**Avotcja:** is a music fanatic/sound junkie and popular Bay Area DeeJay, who is on a melodic mission to heal herself and wants to take you with her!!! Peruvian poet Camincha says: "AVACHA's poetry is music and Avacha's music is poetry. Both are as hot as fire and as soothing as snowflakes. And in both she brings the best of her talent in Spanish and English. Listen to her. Read her. Enjoy her. Celebrate her."

**Edith Bucio:** is a queer Mexicana who has spent more than half of her 27 years dedicated to her writing, and the other half to her community. She enjoys healing through her stories and poems and engages in building community through her art.

**Glorya F. Cabrera, MPA:** Born in Hanford, California, Glorya Cabrera relocated to New York City 15 years ago. She believes the power of words, built upon positive intention, heals trauma and nurtures inspirational growth. Glorya's work, which includes short stories, personal essays and poetry, speaks to growing up Chicana in a racist society, the suffering created by familial pain, the value of defining and nurturing cultural and sexual identities to create authentic voice/authentic power. Her work has been featured in community publications.

**Camila:** Nacida en Monterrey, Nuevo León, México, en 1967. Ha colaborado con asociaciones civiles como Abrazo y Gemas. Su poesía se nutre de la imagen femenina y de la lucha emprendida por la comunidad lésbica en un entorno discriminatorio.

**Gloria Careaga:** Feminista y Psicóloga Social. Profesora de la Facultad de Psicología de la UNAM. Cofundadora de El Closet de Sor Juana y la Fundación Arcoiris en

México. Autora de varias antologías y múltiples artículos. Es miembro del Board de Sexuality Policy Watch y de ILGA.

**Maya Chinchilla:** is a Central American performing poet, educator, scholar and filmmaker. She directed *The Last Word*, about Las Manas, a women of color spoken word crew, and *Made in Brazil: Dreams at Work*. She has produced *Amor Cubano*, a theater show, and the award winning documentary, *Reading Between the Rhymes*, about the use of Hip Hop in education. Currently, she teaches video and poetry to youth in the San Francisco Bay area. See: [www.myspace.com/dreamsatowork](http://www.myspace.com/dreamsatowork), <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/mayachapina>

**Marta Collazo:** is a 52-year-old educator, performance artist and poet, and parent of two educators and visual artists. She participated in a performance project called "Enchochando" in Chicago and created The ID Project, a show where Youth Pride Center members examine issues of identity. Working with After School Matters, Collazo has used art to express health as it applies to high school students. She worked with Little Black Pearl Workshop and the Illinois Department of Health where youth interviewed adults living with HIV/AIDS.

**Comunidad Mujeres Creando:** grupo feminista boliviano. Ver: [mujerescreando@gmail.com](mailto:mujerescreando@gmail.com); Tel: 591-2-2216368

**Patricia Contreras Flores:** is a Queer Lésbica Xicana of Purepeche origins with roots in the Bay area. A film geek by nature, poetry is how she survives and thrives. Youthworker by day, Latina dancer by night, and her favorite role is being Tía Paki to Jessica, Kiara, Sydney and Joaquin. She dedicates this poem to her loving partner Dawn Marie Lowman Hardin! ¡¡¡Que viva el amor!!!

**T. Jackie Cuevas:** is a queer Tejana writer currently pursuing her Ph.D. in English at UT-Austin. She also runs Evelyn Street Press and belongs to Macondo, a creative writers' collective founded by Sandra Cisneros. Cuevas' work was recently featured as part of the collective introduction to the third edition of Gloria Anzaldúa *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute, 2007).

**Dinapiera Di Donato:** Nació en Upata, Venezuela, en 1957. Escritora, investigadora literaria y profesora. Ha publicado *Noche con nieve y amantes* (relatos, 1991), *La sonrisa de Bernardo Atxaga* (relatos, 1995), y *Desventuras del ocio* (poesía, 1996). Entre 1986 y 2007, sus narraciones y poemas han sido incluidos en diversas antologías y estudios. Es ganadora de varios reconocimientos nacionales. Actualmente reside en New York donde prepara una tesis doctoral y enseña lenguas.

**Mayra Lazara Dole:** Born in Havana, Cuba, Myra has been a drummer, dancer, landscape designer, chef, hairstylist, and library assistant. She has authored *Down to the Bone*, a Latina lesbian novel set in Cuban Miami, and two critically acclaimed bilingual books, *Drum, Chavi, Drum!* and *Birthday in the Barrio* (soon to become a short children's film). She has been published in *Cipher Journal* and *Palabra: A Magazine of Chicano and Latino Literary Art*. See: [www.MayraLDole.com](http://www.MayraLDole.com)



incluidos en *A Piece of My Heart: A Lesbian of Colour Anthology*. Actualmente ejerce la Psicoterapia Familiar y de Pareja en México. Ver: moon6luna@gmail.com; luatiquisima@gmail.com

**Peri Labeyrie:** Tengo 42 años y vivo en Córdoba, Argentina. Estudié Comunicación Social en la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba y trabajo como Productora de TV y artista fotógrafa. Soy feminista sin pertenecer a ningún grupo militante, pero es desde esta ideología desde donde miro el mundo. En el último Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres de Argentina (Córdoba, 2007), realicé un extenso fotoreportaje (más de 600 fotos con copyright liberado) que está publicado en: [www.22enm2007.blogspot.com](http://www.22enm2007.blogspot.com)

**Ana-Maurine Lara:** is an Afro-Dominican American author currently residing in Austin, Texas. Her work has appeared in literary journals including *Blithe House Quarterly* and *Torch Magazine*. Her novel, *Erzulie's Skirt*, was a 2006 Lambda Literary finalist. Her novel, *Anacaona's Daughter*, won Third Place Prize in the National Latino/Chicano Literary Prizes. Ana-Maurine is co-author of [bustingbinaries.com](http://bustingbinaries.com). She is a Cave Canem Fellow, a member of The Austin Project, and coordinator of We are the Magicians, the Path-breakers, the Dream-makers LGBTQ POC Oral History Project.

**Anna-Marie López:** began painting in her early 20s. While living in NYC she worked by day in art stores; by night she managed several rock bands. Coming from her native Texas to New York, Lopez's influences range from her Sephardic and Latino heritage, her lesbianism, her travels in the media industry and most importantly, her God and love of Christianity. Lopez now has her own studio and fills her emotional life with her loyal red-haired muse at her side. See: [www.anna-marielopez.com](http://www.anna-marielopez.com)

**Myra López:** I am a lesbian and Puerto Rican raised by a hard working single mother who always put her kids first. I chose the wrong way and am incarcerated but am changing my life by being strong and knowing who I am.

**Nicole Marie López:** I am 20 years old and currently attending Bryn Mawr College. I was born in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico, but grew up in Daytona Beach, Florida. I have had the blessed opportunity to perform my work at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe during open mike sessions, and have been able to share my work at my campus.

**Yesiga López:** I am a Chicana lesbian from a humble background with a heart for social justice and peace. I'm big on dreaming and I love when my real life feels like a really really good dream. I am a former college student activist at UC San Diego and a current labor union organizer for SEIU living, loving, organizing and writing in Los Angeles.

**Nancy Lorenza Green, M.Ed.:** is an Afro-Chicana performance and recording artist from El Paso, Texas, who uses poetry, percussion instruments and flute music as mediums of communication and cultural expression. Nancy has recorded three CDs: *Music From the Heart*, *Life Is Sacred*, and a *Tumblewords* poetry compilation. Her poetry has been published in *Border Senses*, *Chrysalis*, *Cantando al amanecer (Mujeres de Maiz)* and the *International Library of Poetry*. She regularly performs at the Border Book Festival.

**Elena Madrigal:** ha publicado sus cuentos en distintos medios. Con *El hijo del pueblo*, ganó el Concurso Dorian 2006 para cuento de tema homosexual. El concurso fue organizado por el Instituto para la Promoción de la Diversidad y la Cultura, Lima, Perú.

**María Ysabel:** Es una Venezolana con residencia en New York City. Asilada en el país y en la búsqueda de la libertad de expresar su orientación sexual. Solo escribe ocasionalmente como manera de expresión cuando por cierta circunstancia siente la necesidad de hacerlo. Siente que escribir es algunas veces la mejor manera de organizar las ideas y entender los sentimientos propios.

**Lucy Marrero:** is a technical writer, student, and single parent finishing up her degree in English in order to get onto the business of her real life's work in community psychology. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Psychology and figure out how to fight The Man while helping heal his victims. She's been published here and there and spends far too much time writing bad poetry and answering questions like, "But why, Mommy?"

**Lucía Martínez:** I am a dyke Chicana painter and photographer from El Paso and Juárez. My current work reflects the political tensions inherent in both cities. I document the conflict through mixed media of non-violent demonstrations along the border as they deal mostly with immigrants' rights. At the forefront are queers who take on roles of leadership and support. I studied art at the University of Texas-El Paso and the University of Arizona. I have exhibited throughout the United States and Mexico.

**Zemaya Martínez:** My purpose here is to communicate in some way with the Ancestors as often as possible to bring our ancient spiritual ways into the present time. They have reminded me how to pray, communicate with the elements, heal and fly. This poem is the basis for a short film I am creating about remembering our Medicines.

**Marlene Molina S. (Chispa):** Participó del Bloque Lésbico en Chile, donde se unió a la Colectiva Lésbica Feminista Muro Activista La Perlita desde el año 2005. Se desempeña actualmente como encargada del Área de Murales así como en la composición actual de la colectiva. Participó de la Comisión Organizadora del VII Encuentro Lésbico Feminista de América Latina y del Caribe (Chile, 2007) y en la Ekipa plenaria. Actualmente se encuentra cursando estudios de Artes Visuales en la localidad de Santiago de Chile.

**Norma Mogrovejo:** Nací en Juliaca, Perú y desde 1988 vivo autoexiliada en la Ciudad de México. Soy activista y profesora-investigadora de la Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México. Mis publicaciones incluyen *Un amor que no se atrevió decir su nombre: La lucha de las lesbianas y su relación con el movimiento homosexual y feminista en América Latina* (2002), *Lestimonios. Voces de mujeres lesbianas, 1950-2000* (2001), *Teoría lésbica, participación política y literatura* (2004), y *El muro de los gentiles* (2006).



**Doris Moromisato:** is a poet and activist born in Chambala, Perú. She currently lives in Lima, Perú. She is the author of *Morada donde la luna perdió su palidez* (1988), *Chambala era camino* (1999), and *Diario de la mujer esponja* (2004).

**Claudia Narváez-Meza:** is a Nicaraguan-born poet, activist, and social worker raised in Brooklyn. She completed an MFA in poetry at Brooklyn College and a Master in Social Work at New York University. In January 2007, her narrative entitled "Sowing for Lineage," appeared in the anthology *Homelands: Women's Journeys Across Race, Place, and Time*. Claudia is currently doing postgraduate training at the Ackerman Institute for the Family and works with Black and Latino children and families at the Coalition for Hispanic Family Services in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

**Maritza Nazario:** was born and raised in beautiful Puerto Rico. Her artistic training includes acting, theatrical direction, playwriting and poetry writing. She resides in Chicago. Ms. Nazario is the executive director of En Las Tablas Performing Arts and is a member of La Dulce Palabra spoken word collective.

**oneangrygirlfag:** is the pseudonym for Linda Heidenreich grew up in a mixed Euro-Latino family in northern California. She now teaches with the department of Women's Studies at Washington State University and has a history book titled *This Land was Mexican Once*.

**Miriam Zoila Pérez:** is the daughter of Cuban immigrants, born and raised in North Carolina. She is a writer, activist, and doula (provides emotional support to women in labor), and works as the Senior Advocacy Associate at the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health. She lives in Washington, DC.

**mariana pessah:** Me auto defino como artista política de la oktava dimensión; latinoamericana y caribeña. Soy fotógrafa de profesión pero también me gusta incursionar por otras áreas como la escritura y otras artes. Tengo publicados varios ensayos y un libro de literatura lesbica-feminista *Malena y el mar* que recientemente fue publicado en italiano. Vivo acompañada por una gran obsesión, la de transformar este mundo; por eso amo el arte y la política, porque me permiten crear, imaginar, habitar otros mundos. Jugar. Ver: [marianapessah@yahoo.com.br](mailto:marianapessah@yahoo.com.br); <http://www.flickr.com/photos/marianapessah>

**Milka Ramírez:** was born in Puerto Rico and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Milka works as a social worker and describes herself as a social justice worker. She resides in Chicago, is the chairperson for En Las Tablas Performing Arts, and is a member of La Dulce Palabra spoken word collective.

**Juanita Ramos:** is the pseudonym for Juanita Díaz-Cotto, a Black Puerto Rican lesbian feminist socialist activist and academic. She is the editor of *Compañeras: Latina Lesbians (An Anthology)*, *Lesbianas Latinoamericanas* (eds. 1, 2, and 3 [2004]), and author of *Gender, Ethnicity, and the State: Latina and Latino Prison Politics* (1996) and *Chicana Lives and Criminal Justice: Voices from El Barrio* (2006) (winner of an International Latino Book Award and a ForeWord Book Award). She was a co-founder of Las "Buenas Amigas," Latina Lesbian group (NYC). See: [juanitadiazcotto.com](http://juanitadiazcotto.com)

**Yolanda Retter Vargas, Ph.D. (1947-2007):** was an Anglo/Peruvian archivist, editor, scholar, consultant, activist, and self-proclaimed “herstorian” who dedicated the last 40 years of her life to documenting, preserving, and visibilizing the histories of lesbians and people of color. She helped organize lesbian history repositories at USC, UCLA and in West Hollywood. She last worked as the librarian and archivist for the UCLA Chicano Studies Resource Center. Nicknamed “Yolanda the Terrible” or “Y the T” for her confrontational manner, Yolanda was on the board of several women’s organizations and was a founding member of Latin American Lesbians of Los Angeles (1974) and Lesbianas Latinas (1980). She was also involved in Lesbianas Unidas. In 1988, she appeared on “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” Yolanda co-edited and co-wrote several books including the award-winning *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (1997), and *Gay and Lesbian Rights in the United States: A Documentary History* (2003). Most recently, she published an autobiographical essay in *Time it Was: American Stories from the Sixties* (2007). Yolanda’s won a number of awards and honors the last of which was the Rainbow Key Award from the Lesbian and Gay Advisory Board of the West Hollywood City Council for her contributions and dedication to “making lesbian and Latina lesbian history materials widely available to researchers and the writers who tell our stories” (June 2007). She earned a B.A. in sociology, an M.A. in both library science and social work, and a Ph.D. in American Studies. Yolanda passed away from cancer on August 18, 2007. All of us who knew her as a friend will sorely miss her. Yolanda donated her scholarly papers and memoirs to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. (Sources: Elaine Woo, *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 2007; Jeanne Cordova & Lynn Ballen, *Bay Area Reporter* 38, No. 30 [July 24 2008]).

**Verónica Reyes:** is a Chicana feminist jota from East Los Angeles, Califas. She has an M.F.A. from the University of Texas, El Paso. Recently, she was a writing resident at Vermont Studio Center. She’s won the Intro-Journal Project from AWP, an Emerging Artist award from Astraea Lesbian Foundation, and was a finalist for the Andrés Montoya Poetry prize. Her poems have appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Borderlands*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, and the *Jota zines*. Currently, she is adjunct faculty at California State University, Los Angeles.

**Mónica M. Rivera Colón:** Soy puertorriqueña. Vivo profundamente enamorada de la mujer y me apasionan la música, las palabras, la tierra y los animales. Creo en la lucha por la independencia. Tuve el privilegio de ser desobediente civil en la causa de Vieques. Ver: morivera2006@hotmail.com

**Leni Rivera, M. Ed.:** Tiene 36 años y es maestra del sistema público de Puerto Rico. Ver: <http://lealtad19.hi5.com>; [lealtad19@yahoo.com](mailto:lealtad19@yahoo.com)

**Gabriela Robledo:** es abogada y activista LGTTBI. Trabaja en la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina, y es miembro del Movimiento de Mujeres de Córdoba.

**Carmen N. Rodríguez:** I was born and raised in Austin, Texas. I am a writer and painter. I’ve exhibited my work in galleries throughout Austin. I spend most of my time volunteering for *Latinitas Magazine*, a non-profit magazine committed to empowering Hispanic youth. Most of the inspiration for my work comes from the volunteering I do

as well as my experiences with homophobia, drug abuse, bulimia and depression. See: [www.LatinitasMagazine.org](http://www.LatinitasMagazine.org); [carmenrodriguez@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:carmenrodriguez@mail.utexas.edu)

**Chastity Rodríguez:** is a Puerto Rican late-blooming lesbian mother of a three year old and she is finally living la vida auténtica. This poem is dedicated to her Mariposa Valerosa and all women who risk the wild.

**Randi M. Romo:** is the co-founder and the current director of the Center for Artistic Revolution working for Fairness & Equality for ALL Arkansans. Randi is a radical, passionate, word slinging, art making Chicana Queer.

**Mariana Romo-Carmona:** is the author of *Speaking Like An Immigrant, Living at Night* and the editor of the Lambda Award-winning anthology published in Spanish by Cleis Press, *Conversaciones: Relatos por padres y madres de hijas lesbianas e hijos gay*. The recipient of the Astraea Foundation Lesbian Fiction Award, Romo-Carmona taught on the faculty of the MFA Program in Writing at Goddard College, Vermont. She also taught Latin American and Spanish Literature at the JSM Institute for Labor Studies (CUNY), in New York City. See: [writingatnight.com](http://writingatnight.com)

**Nadia Rosso:** Nació en la Ciudad de Méjico en el 1986. Es estudiante de Leguas y Literatura en la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. En el 2006 ayudó a fundar el Grupo Lésbico Universitario (<http://glunam.blogspot.com>). Actualmente reside en Méjico.

**Ana Lilia Salinas:** was born in Alice, Texas. She has a BFA and an M.S. in Bilingual Education. She has worked as a high school art teacher. Presently, she is a restaurateur. Salinas has exhibited at Trópico de Nopal and Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles, and at Austin City Hall. Her work will form part of the Latino Art Collection and the Chicano print collection at the UT-San Antonio. She is part of the first Coronado Series Print Project. See: [analiliasalinas.com](http://analiliasalinas.com)

**Rose M. Santos-Cunningham:** I am an educator both at the high school and college level in New York City, where I grew up and now live.

**Griselda Suárez:** is a Xicana lesbian writer, artist and teacher. She currently teaches at Cal State Long Beach in the Chican@/Latin@ Studies Department. She was born in East Los Angeles and walked Whittier Blvd. and Brooklyn Ave. in black and white saddle shoes. She lives with her partner and suegra in Long Beach, Califas. Griselda enjoys meditating over warm suds and dirty dishes. And if timing is right, you can catch her reenacting her Quinceañera.

**Artemisa Téllez:** Nació en el 1979. Ingresó a la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la UNAM donde recibió la licenciatura en Letras Hispánicas. Es editora (*dentrodelcoctel.info*), columnista (*Homópolis*), y observadora política. Ha publicado *Versos cautivos* (poesía, 2001) y *Un encuentro y otros* (2004); y ha escrito para distintos medios (e.g., *Notan queer*, *Letra S*). Ha coproducido dos espectáculos musicopoéticos de temática lésbica. Es miembro de la colectiva lésbica Meras Efímeras ([www.myspace.com/merasefimeras](http://www.myspace.com/merasefimeras)). Reconoce como rasgo distintivo el estar francamente encabronada.

**Rose M. Santos-Cunningham:** I am an educator both at the High School and College level in New York City, where I grew up and now live.

**Lidia Tirado Tirado:** Nací en Mazatlán, Sinaloa, México. Me gradué de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México como Socióloga. Feminista desde que tuve uso de razón. Fundadora desde 1999 del grupo lésbico Mujeres Mayores de 30. Creo en el lesbianismo como una alternativa política para muchas mujeres en una sociedad sexista. Ver: tirado30@yahoo.com.mx

**Luz María (Luzma) Umpierre:** is a Puerto Rican lesbian poet. She has seven books published and countless articles and creative work in lesbian journals. She is also a human rights advocate and has received numerous awards for her work with victims of AIDS and emotional illnesses. She resides in Maine. See: [www.luzmaumpierre.com](http://www.luzmaumpierre.com)

**L. Vera:** is a lesbian Mexican immigrant who came to this country at age 14. She writes in English, Spanish or *Spanglish*. She writes with the nurturing and support of the Chicago-based lesbian writer collective La Dulce Palabra.

**Patricia Karina Vergara Sánchez:** Mi rostro es el de una indígena mexicana, morena, oscura, cara aplastada. Sin embargo, hace tres generaciones que mi familia perdió su herencia cultural, por lo que estoy huérfana de historia. También soy lesbiana, activista, gorda, madre de una niña, feminista, libertaria y enamorada eterna de las letras, las acciones, los saberes, la magia y la hermandad entre mujeres. Hoy, soy creyente firme de que las hijas de la diosa, estamos haciendo nacer otra mundo y otra historia posibles.



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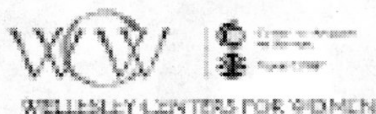
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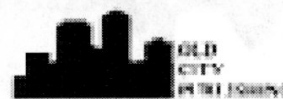
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\* Available on audio tape

# **Sinister Wisdom**

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www.sinister.org

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- 61 Women Loving Women in Prison
- 62 Lesbian Writers on Writing and Reading
- 63 Lesbians and Nature
- 64 Lesbians and Music, Drama and Art
- 65 Lesbian Mothers and Grandmothers
- 66 Lesbians and Activism
- 67 Lesbians and Work
- 68/69 Death, Grief and Surviving
- 70 Sinister Wisdom's 30th Anniversary Issue
- 71 Open Issue
- 72 Utopia
- 73 The Art Issue
- 74 Latina Lesbians
- 75 Lesbian Theories / Lesbian Controversies
- 76 Open Issue
- 77 Environmental Issues / Lesbian Concerns
- 78 Old Lesbians/Dykes II
- 79 Call for Guest Editor(s)

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## Upcoming Issues: Call for Material

Please read the submission guidelines on the inside back cover before sending material.

Please check our website for updates and details.

### Two Spirit Women of First Nations

This issue will be printed when we receive enough material.

Guest Editors: Chrystos (Menominee) and Sunny Birdstone (Ktunaxa)

3250 S 77th #8 Tacoma, WA 98409. Email: creptoies@yahoo.com.

### #75 Lesbian Theories/Lesbian Controversies

Forthcoming

Guest Editor: Julie Enszer: Email

### #76 Open Issue

Due September 1, 2008

Editor: Fran Day . P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473 – 1180

Please read the submission guidelines carefully before sending material. No erotica, sadomasochism or violence.

### #77 Environmental Issues/Lesbian Concerns

Due December 1, 2008

Guest Editor: Diane Foster

Mother Earth is at risk! Her soul cries for love, nurturing and protection. The veins of her ecosystem are weakening, the air she provides is choked with pollutants, her nutrients providing sustenance for life are poisoned by those with no regard or respect for life itself. Her travails giving life to this planet has found her weeping polluted, agony stained tears. As Mother Earth Lesbians, the 77th issue of Sinister Wisdom relates to what Lesbians around the world feel concerning Environmental Issues. Topics included, but not limited to are: lesbian and/or lesbian groups working in the realm of saving/protecting the environment, what efforts are being done, who and where are Earth-Conscious Lesbians. Does your heart cry out, are you angry? Do you feel there is a correlation between patriarchal dominance and the state of our environment? Do Lesbians and/or Lesbian groups face unique challenges and/or oppositions in their quest to protect and save Mother Earth from environmental devastation? This issue welcomes prose, short story, poetry, essays; from the serious to the lighthearted, but they all must deliver a succinct message.

Send material for #77 only to Diane Foster

email:dianefoster683@hotmail.com, or mail to: Diane Foster, 5400

Montgomery Blvd. NE, #401 B, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 87109. Emails preferred.

### #78 Old Dykes/Lesbians II

Due March 1, 2009

Editor: Fran Day . P. O. Box 1180, Sebastopol, CA 95473-1180.

### #79 Call for Guest Editor(s) Due July 1, 2009



**Submissions:** See page for themes. Check our website at [www.sinisterwisdom.org](http://www.sinisterwisdom.org) for updates on upcoming issues. Please read the guidelines below before sending material.

Material should be sent to the editor or guest editor of the issue. Everything else should be sent to Sinister Wisdom, POB 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703.

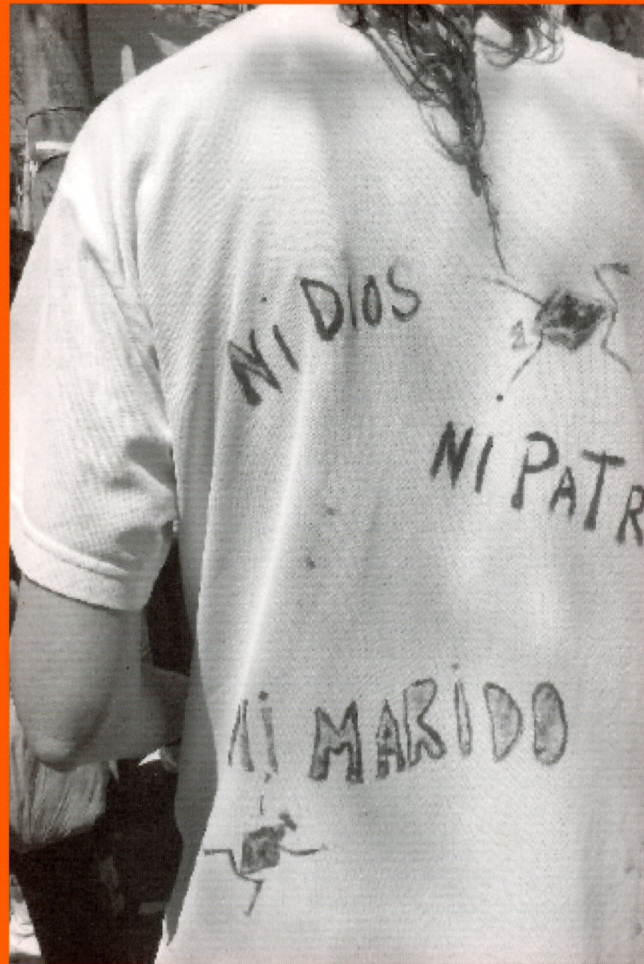
**Writing and Art Guidelines: Please read carefully.**

Material may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum: five poems, two short stories or essays, or one longer piece of up to 2500 words. We prefer that you send your work by email in Word. If sent by mail, material must be mailed flat (not folded) with your name and address on each page. We prefer you type your work but short legible handwritten pieces will be considered; tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All work must be on white paper. Please proofread your work carefully; do not send changes after the deadline. A self-addressed stamped business-sized envelope must be enclosed. If you want acknowledgement of receipt, enclose a separate self-addressed stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos or drawings (duplicates) of their work (no slides). Images sent electronically must have a resolution of 225 for photos and 600 for line drawings. TIFFs are preferred. Please do not send large files electronically – send each photo separately. Include a 3-5 sentence autobiographical sketch written exactly as you want it printed.

We publish only Lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as Lesbians of color, ethnic Lesbians, Jewish, Arab, old, young, working class, poverty class, disabled, and fat Lesbians. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to Lesbians or women, or that perpetuates stereotypes. Because many of our readers are in prison, we cannot include explicit sex, obscenities, or art with frontal nudity. No sado-masochism.

Please contact us if you have a new theme you would like to see explored. We are looking for guest editors for future issues.

Sinister Wisdom, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization. We provide free subscriptions to women in prison and psychiatric institutions (20% of our mailing list), as well as reduced price subscriptions for Lesbians with limited/fixed incomes. \* Enclose an extra \$10 to \$50 on your renewal to help cover publishing costs (larger donations accepted). \* Give Sinister Wisdom for birthdays, holidays, and special occasions. \* Please consider organizing a benefit or subscription drive for Sinister Wisdom in your area.



*Neither God, nor country, nor husband.  
Remeras inteligentes por Peri Labeyrie*

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