

# LATINO 2021 BOOK REVIEW *magazine*

INTERVIEW WITH  
MARIA HINOJOSA

POETRY  
VISUAL ARTS  
FICTION  
NONFICTION  
FILM  
CULTURE  
RESEARCH  
BOOK REVIEWS



**FOUNDER & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**  
**GERALD A. PADILLA**

It is with great honor that I present Latino Book Review's 2021 printed magazine issue. This year's groundbreaking issue draws from powerful Latin American voices from around the world and brings our community closer as authors and scholars share experiences that go beyond their written texts.

At a time when ethnic and racial tensions in the United States are increasing, it is necessary, more now than ever, to disseminate narratives that showcase Latin American cultures and values with greater depth and authenticity. In this sense, Latino Book Review breaks the negative stereotypes reproduced by mainstream media. It generates a broader understanding of Latinx communities by being a transformative cultural force that serves as a bridge between people from different backgrounds.

With this magazine, it is our continued purpose and pleasure to bring you wonderful authors, scholars, and artists from around the world to showcase content that elevates and provides justice to our community's legacy.

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# LATINO BOOK REVIEW

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*A revolution is coming,  
not of bullets but words.*

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Kevin Abosch

# Maria Hinojosa: Once I Was You

HECTOR “VALE” RENDÓN: Maria Hinojosa has been a journalist for nearly 30 years. She has won multiple awards, including four Emmys and two Kennedy Awards For Excellence in Journalism. She’s the host of the radio show, *Latino USA*, distributed by NPR, and she is the founder of Futuro Media, a nonprofit company focused on telling the stories of minorities in the U.S. She’s here with us to talk about her book, *Once I Was You*. Maria, thank you so much for being with us.

MARIA HINOJOSA: It’s my pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

RENDÓN: I wanted to ask you about this new book that was published very recently, *Once I Was You*. Of course, it’s a memoir, and it talks about your experience in the U.S. But I wanted to ask you about why you decided to write this memoir. Tell us about your experience.

HINOJOSA: Well, actually, I was thinking of writing a much smaller book. The book that I thought I was going to write was going to be a small pocketbook called *Illegal Is Not a Noun*, as people use the term illegal to refer to a human being. The truth is that writing a book is a lot of emotional work. It’s a lot of physical labor. And I was prepared to write a little book. But it turned out that the publishing world didn’t want a little book from me. They wanted a bigger book. They wanted a big book. And so it turned out that it wasn’t just

going to be a memoir. We really decided that this was going to be like a history book—a book that was going to be deeply intimate, deeply personal, and at the same time, a book that is telling the history of the United States through my eyes, through my experience. Physically and as an investigative journalist, I’d like to say that Gloria Steinem kind of got it best when she said, “It’s multiple books in one,” because it’s a book about being an immigrant, it’s a book about being a Mexican, it’s a book about being a Latina, it’s a book about being a journalist, it’s a book about being a survivor of rape. It’s a book about growing up in the civil rights era in the United States. And ultimately, it’s a triumphant book because I end up creating my own media company. When I knew that my book was going to be coming out in the fall of 2020, *te lo juro de que* I was just like, oh, gosh, by then nobody’s going to have anything new to say, about anything. And actually, the opposite is true. A lot of people feel like it was written for this moment and that it needs to be read in this moment. I think it even applies more than when it was published—because in this moment, at the end of 2020, I think there is expectation, there is possibility, there’s reckoning, but there’s also expectation and hope. In many ways, it feels fit for the end of the year.

RENDÓN: It is very fit. And I think the current context actually relates very much to many of the stories that

you tell in your book. You mentioned already that you are a survivor, and of course, many other things that have shaped your identity and who you are as an individual. When you say *Once I Was You*, who are you talking to? Who is “you” in this case?

HINOJOSA: Well, there are many authors who write a book, and they know what the title is, and they’re very lucky. I was writing this book, but I did not know what the title was. And we were very frustrated. I was very scared, honestly, because I was like, “Oh, my God”. My editor said, “Don’t worry, we’ll find a title, it will happen.” We were having such a hard time that we brought a new perspective, and somebody who hadn’t read the book. The introduction to the book is a moment where I encounter a little girl who is in the process of being trafficked, transported by individuals who were ultimately paid for by the U.S. government. And she was with a group of other children. They were being taken from McAllen to who knows where. We were on a flight to Houston. And I end that introductory moment, as I described this, witnessing the greatest horror of the United States of America—the separating of children, the taking of children as a form of punishment, and I was witnessing it in the airport. They denied me the capacity to speak to the children. They told me, “You’re not allowed, they’re not allowed to speak to anybody.” And so *en voz alta*, I just started saying loudly to the

kids, “Hey,” in Spanish, “You have the right to speak to a journalist, you have the right to know that there are people here in this country who care about you and who want to know that you’re okay.” And then I looked to the little girl, and I wrote, “I wanted you to hear that I was saying all of this. I wanted you to know that I saw you because once I was you.” And in the writing of the book, it was revealed in great clarity to me that when I arrived in this country, with privilege, with a green card, with my mother and my family at the airport in Dallas in the year 1962, they almost took me. They almost took me from my mother’s arms. And in that sense, *Once I Was You* is that I was a child who was almost taken. I’m not in any way, shape or form saying I am a refugee from Central America. But there is something in my soul that can identify with the trauma of separation. It goes very deep, and I wasn’t separated because my mother *empezó a gritar*. You know, she just made a scene. She used her privilege. I thought it was just because she had a big mouth. But no, it was actually later that she told me, “That was my trauma speaking.” But you know, also in many ways, *Once I Was You* is kind of the way I work as a journalist. I really try to meet people where they are and to find myself in the people most unlike me. And in that sense, *Once I Was You* is just a broader statement that we share a common humanity.

RENDÓN: That’s a very powerful image. Thank you for sharing that—all of the stories that you describe in your book. You have had an amazing life, if you want to put it that way, an incredible life. Of all these stories, which one do you think was the one that marked you the most?

HINOJOSA: I think *Once I Was You* captures that it’s all not, you know, *no son puras rosas y flores*. And along the way, I have met extraordinary people, from very powerful, highly recognized people to people who do not have power at all. Oftentimes, I say that the people who have most changed me are

those people, the ones who don’t really have any power but their own will, their own desire to live, their own kind of desire for humanity and justice. Many of them are refugees. But it’s interesting now because I used to say that the story that changed my life the most was 911—having survived that, developing PTSD afterwards, covering it for a year for CNN. But you know, now being a survivor of COVID—I got it early on in the pandemic—and having lived through this, this is a story of our times. I don’t think we quite understand what we have lived through just since the beginning of the pandemic to the end of the year. And then, in large, the last four years under Donald Trump, if you’re Latino or Latina, or an immigrant—a particularly challenging time.

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“...this country has  
an international  
human rights crisis.”

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RENDÓN: In relation to that, what do you say to those people that have been describing the behavior of Latinos at the ballot box in a negative sense, because I have heard so many times, especially from mainstream media that, “Latinas didn’t vote for this one candidate that we were expecting,” or “Latinos didn’t do what we wanted them to do?” So what is this obsession of society in general, wanting to direct the lives of Latinos in that way? Do they speak the same about other ethnic groups?

HINOJOSA: You know, we’re really witnessing it, *como que* it’s right in front of us. We are witnessing what it’s like for Latinos and Latinas to be made into a kind of spectacle by the mainstream media. Yes, I think the mainstream media believes that they’re doing a great job, because they’re talking about us. It’s

almost like, “Aren’t you satisfied? We’re talking about Latinos. I mean, isn’t that great?” And what we’re saying is, you are failing to see the bigger picture. I think that there’s just no way in which the mainstream media, in this past election cycle, communicated the truth, which is that Latinos and Latinas are the second-largest voting bloc in the United States of America, period. That is all they need to know. And they should be repeating, and they should have treated this electorate as such. Therefore, there should be Latino and Latina analysts on all of the networks and cable channels, and all of the news sources. And there should be Latino and Latina columnists, from LA to New York to Chicago to everywhere. There should be Latinos and Latinas on the presidential debates. We should be on the presidential debate commission—none of that. So it’s very interesting to see how, at a time when more white voters came out, turned out for Donald Trump, the fascination of the mainstream media is not that, not “What is wrong with white people?” but rather, “What is wrong with Latinos and Latinas?” And actually, the truth is, is that Latinos and Latinas have been voting at about 30% for Republicans for a while and higher than that for George W. Bush. We can’t forget that the Republican Party, for whatever it’s worth, actually go after the Latino vote. They did. They went after the Latino vote in a way that the Democratic Party is like “ehh.” I mean, Bernie Sanders did come out for the Latino/Latina vote, and I think we saw the response, and we saw what happened. But other than that, it’s kind of like, “Well, you’re gonna come out and vote for us anyway.” And that’s just been deeply distressing to witness again, because I’ve been covering elections for a couple of decades now. And again, for the mainstream media, I believe that they are patting themselves on the back and saying “Well, we’re at least talking about you.” Wow. To not recognize that they do not know how to poll Latinos and Latinas and somehow say, “you know, the Latino community is a problem community in terms of

polling.” It’s like, no we’re not, if you know how to poll us. The thing is that if you look at Florida, it’s not rocket science to understand kind of how that vote plays out. But you cannot say Florida and its Latinos, as diverse as they are, is the same as what just happened in Arizona, where Latinos and Latinas pushed Arizona blue—in Arizona and Nevada, and even in the Midwest, and in Pennsylvania. In those places, Latinos and Latinas were the back propellor to the black vote. But in places like Arizona and Nevada, we were not the rear push. We were the central push. And that’s a very different story than Latinos and Latinas in Florida.

RENDÓN: Exactly. Now, let me get back to your book. You tell a story about immigration. What are you proposing in terms of the concept of immigration?

HINOJOSA: I have reported on immigration. I understand the complexity of public policy. What I can say is that what is happening now in the United States of America is unacceptable. And people have asked me, “What do we do about the immigration problem?” and I’m like, “Oh, this country does not have an immigration problem, at all.” There’s zero net migration. And refugees are basically down to zero as well. Right now, what this country has is an international human rights crisis, where the only difference is that we were not born here. And because our bodies were not born on the U.S. mainland, we are subject to being denied due process, to having our children taken from us, to being put in cages, to having our uterus taken out. So, we have children without their parents, and I just find it incredibly hard to believe that a country that says it’s the first in the world for so many things, that this country cannot reunite children with their parents—can’t find them? It should be priority number one. And then, I think the other thing is that you have to really approach immigration from a different mindset. You know, not every person wants to leave their country and come

to the United States. It just isn’t true. The caravans from Central America of the refugees were thousands, not tens of thousands. People, if given the opportunity, they want to come here aboveboard legally, as long as you’re not coming after them to rip them away from their families. They will give you everything, all of their personal information, but you carry your end of the deal, which is, “If you come here, and you’re aboveboard, we’re not going to chase you out, and we’re not going to deport you.” To me, these are the basic things about discussing some kind of reform, but it has to be based on humanity and common interest as opposed to the narrative, which is immigrants, Latinos, in particular, are dangerous, demanding, dependent, criminals. None of that is true. None of that is true.

RENDÓN: How guilty do you think mainstream media—we’re getting back to mainstream media—are of these kind of images that people have in their minds in relation to Latinos and Latinas? Because even for professional outlets like the big newspapers, very well-respected networks, they reproduce these stories over and over again, with these kind of images. You have been a journalist for more than 30 years—I’m a journalist as well. So I’m asking you, do you have any ideas on how we can transmit these concepts or these ideas to colleagues that are working for these companies, for them to stop reproducing these ideas.

HINOJOSA: I think what we have to remember is that the mainstream news across the board, almost 100% is owned and operated—and editors in chief—are white men, heterosexual, white men of privilege. And let’s say that they’re at the end of their careers. Now they’re 70 years old, 60 years old. They have grown up watching the same images on the mainstream media that have been repeated, as you say, for decades and decades. So they don’t know any different. You have to recognize that you don’t know any different, and therefore,

that’s why you have representation in a newsroom. If you have diversity in your newsroom, they’re gonna say, “Oh, these are images that are incorrect. This does not apply.” And so, I’m not gonna say it’s not that they don’t know any better. I’m saying that they’re victims of the same kind of narratives to which all Americans who consume the news media are victims—these erroneous images of people trying to get into this country massively.

RENDÓN: Is it inertia?

HINOJOSA: Is it inertia? I mean, it’s inertia in the sense that *no se van*. I mean, where is the creating of space at the senior-most levels in the news networks? We don’t have that much. We have, I think there is one senior Latina at NBC News. We have a couple of anchors, but there isn’t a representation for the kind of population growth and influence that we have in the country. We don’t really see Latinos and Latinas in large enough numbers to make this kind of a difference. The way in which, after Barack Obama was elected, there was a kind of like, “Whoa, we have to really think about how we talk about black men, because a black man is the President of the United States.” We need to have one of those moments, which is like, “Whoa, we really need to rethink how we talk about Latinos and Latinas and immigrants.” But the news media needs to own their responsibility in creating this mess.

RENDÓN: Your book is also published in Spanish with the title, *Una vez fui tú*. What does it mean for you? Because normally, publishers don’t publish the same book in both English and Spanish. So what does it mean for you? Was it a request from you to publish it in Spanish?

HINOJOSA: I did want to have the book in Spanish. It is not a market-based decision for me. But I do feel that it makes a statement, and it has brought me great joy to see multigenerational younger women reading it in English and their moms reading it in Spanish.



We're doing an Instagram takeover where we're publishing their photos of people reading the book, just so people can see the different faces of people reading *Once I Was You*. That has been one of my great joys, to see [someone say], "My mom is reading it in Spanish." I really would love to sit down and have a conversation with them because I did not write the book in Spanish, and it was really hard. The translation part of it was very painful for me because I write very . . . it's just like the way I talk. It's more kind of just very real, authentic, the way one talks because I write for radio, oftentimes.

RENDÓN: Similar to a stream of consciousness?

HINOJOSA: *Un poco*. I mean, we edit it down so that it makes sense, but when I'm writing, that is kind of what I'm doing. I'm like, "Oh, my God, and then this happened, and then this happened, and then this happened." And *cuando estoy hablando en español es otra cosa*. And I would have had to have told the same stories all over again in Spanish to get "like me." Somebody would have had to have said, "*No pero entonces cuéntame qué pasó en ese momento*," so that I could say it in Spanish, and maybe get closer. But what I'm trying

to say is that one of the fundamental, I hope, messages in the book is of course, we have to love ourselves. But that particular notion of *ni soy de aquí ni soy de allá*, I actually, I'm trying to say that is our superpower, *y sí soy de aquí, y soy de allá*. And I do speak multiple languages. Maybe not each at 100%, but at least I'm speaking two languages, or three or four. I'm always trying to flip the narrative for the reader, for Latinos and Latinas in this country to say, "This is our superpower." Don't feel negative about it. Be proud, own it.

RENDÓN: And that is very interesting, because in some places around the United States, of course, there are people who don't want their kids to suffer discrimination. And they don't teach them Spanish. I agree with you. It's a superpower to speak both languages and being from both places at the same time. So, you mentioned love already, and I wanted to ask you about that. What is the part of the book that you love the most?

HINOJOSA: Probably my story as a woman. I think this was, for me, one of the things to recognize, my power as a woman. And that extends to as a woman journalist, as a mom, as a wife, as a friend, as a role model. I think

this was part of what I did want to kind of share. But that's an interesting question. No one's really asked me that question. I could say, also, the experience of being an immigrant. I'm very hopeful. My dream is that the little girl who I meet in the airport—now it's two years, almost—maybe she's in the United States. Maybe by now she's already fluent in English. Maybe she gets a hold of this book in English or in Spanish, and she sees herself and recognizes her own power. So I think there are multiple ways in which I can see that there was love and power in writing these particular stories. One of the things that has been fascinating for me, is having people say, "Ay Maria, but you know, you're so successful." By the way, I've been doing this for a while. So yeah, I would hope so. *Pero* they're like, "Oh, my God, you're so successful. Why would you want to reveal that you're insecure, or that you battled the imposter syndrome?" I don't believe that journalism is something that you do to make a lot of money. Some people can, hey, bravo. But to me, it's more like a service. And so if I'm going to continue to be of service, I'm like, well *sabes qué*, let me tell you about some of the things that I've experienced that really are a waste of our emotional, psychological

time. Feeling the imposter syndrome is real, but it's better to just talk about it and try to push through it than to just have it forever and ever and ever. And that's why I wanted to write about it.

RENDÓN: I really like how the book reads in a very powerful way. And of course, it shows the different facets of people as successful as you, as you were saying, but that everybody's human at the end, and that everybody has to overcome struggles. I think it's remarkable. Your story is remarkable.

HINOJOSA: Thank you.

RENDÓN: I've seen that you are very active on social media, and you engage with your followers. So, in what way, besides that one, do you want to connect with your readers? I guess what I'm asking is, what do you expect the readers to get out of your book?

HINOJOSA: When you're writing something like this, I was not writing *per se*, with an expectation of what am I going to create for the reader. As a writer, if you start out that way, it's a challenge. So for me, it was more, how can I be the most honest and authentic about my experience? And in that sense, when you ask, "How do I want to connect with the readers?" well I want them to see that we all have this deep power inside of us, that capacity to survive, fight all kinds of challenges—that's something that is important to me. There is that scene in *Once I Was You* where I'm kind of like, "Oh, my God, I'm about to go on National Public Radio for the first time on NPR. And I've got to kind of decide what's going to happen?" Am I Maria Hinojosa? [English accent] or am I going to be Maria Hinojosa? [Spanish accent] And I realized at that moment, as I write in the book, I was like, "Okay, well, this is a very personal decision right now. But actually, whatever you do, it's going to have consequences." And in that sense, I hope to be very approachable, very honest, hoping that people feel touched by my work. That, on a personal level, they can identify with me, but that, at

a broader level, they can identify with what I'm talking about—reckoning with American history and how it has treated people of color, Latinos and Latinas, and immigrants historically in this country.

RENDÓN: You have accomplished that in several ways with this book. And also, you are a role model for a lot of people. So I think that level of honesty is essential for people who see you as an icon of Latinas to understand that it's not beneath you, right?

HINOJOSA: I just think it's funny when people are like, "You're an icon," and I'm like, "Umm, I'm five feet tall." [Laughs] Yes, I have success, but you know, there's a lot of fight that comes with that—fighting against my own insecurities to push through. So I think right now, in our country, this is a moment where—especially living through a pandemic, you know—we're living at home and working from home. It's a time in which we can really say, "I'm just like you." And I think that's one thing that we have experienced, a lot of the filters have come off.

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*"...the refugee  
woman... Those are  
my role models too."*

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RENDÓN: Lastly, let me ask you, who are your role models? I said, you're a role model for a lot of people, not only women but also for many men who find your story fascinating. But, who are the people who have influenced your thinking, your life, even your writing?

HINOJOSA: Uff, I mean, a long list of women and men. I'm getting ready to go to Mexico to see my mother who I haven't seen in almost two years, so I have to go see her. She is certainly

one of my greatest role models, and she's still a firecracker in her 80s—still going strong. And there are so many powerful women that I have met. I mean, oh my goodness!—people like Sonia Sotomayor, who I've been able to meet and interview and actually hang out with. You know, how does Sonia move in this world as a Supreme Court justice? You know, Sandra Cisneros is a great role model for me. And Sandra Cisneros, I'm friends with her, with Julia Alvarez, with Anna Castillo, Denise Chávez, the great Latina writers. But I'm also friends with newer Latina writers, Jessica Salgado, or Elizabeth Acevedo, younger writers. I'm getting to know them and their work, so I feel influenced by them. And then there's the great feminist, I mean, my God, Gloria Steinem gave a blurb for my book, Jane Fonda gave a blurb for my . . . [Laughs] It's like, what? And so I learned from them. I think what you learn in the book is that there are some key people in my life, my best friend Sandy, who's African American, Cecilia Vaisman, may she rest in peace, these few women who are kind of solid core friends, my Latinas in power group. For me, a role model is, you know, from Cardi B, who I'm dying to interview one day to the woman refugee, who crossed into the United States with fear to save herself and her daughter's life, who is living underground in this country with no plans, nothing, but thankful to be alive. Those women are my role models too.

RENDÓN: I wish we had more time for this interview Maria, but *muchas gracias*.

HINOJOSA: Thank you so much for the work that you're doing. You may not know this, but the work that you do, and the fact that you're doing this work is really important. It is part of our narrative. And so I'm thrilled and honored to have been interviewed, and congratulations and *más*.

RENDÓN: *Vamos por más. Muchas gracias Maria.*

# POETRY

## ALEJANDRO VILLA VÁSQUEZ

## SUDS

I called your name out  
hands the color of mutt.  
A peso of soap and a touch of blame.  
That crown, negro azabache, eclipsed the bathroom's light.

Booming like a mountain you told me to wash my hands  
glaring bottle of ron in your hands.  
There was no need to scold me, dean of addictions  
wash my fingers — let me be seven.

But you'd rather sud and hiccup.  
It wasn't enough when you belched, fatherly, indifferent  
it was enough when tap water turned my hands red as you.  
It was enough to have your beautiful tips

not digging but soaping mine  
coddling me clean.  
But you cuddle bottles like a son  
a thoughtless burp for me.

Only in dreams temperate as a child  
did you shield me from  
rum spits, you still beam  
from these memories.

I wouldn't give your nimbus negro for all the bubbles  
of another family; the stir between us  
when you would foam gentle and papá.  
The thought pops quiet as hope.

You, you, you, I call you today from across  
a continent away. You are a globe I pine after  
as I streak detergent on dish, and  
quick as you ripple my sight, it pops with abandon and might.



## THELMA TRUJILLO

"I LOVE YOU" AND OTHER SIMILAR CURSES  
OF THE TONGUE

I sit  
on your plum corduroy couch sipping  
stale coffee  
trying  
to extinguish the memory  
of your warm cinnamon skin,  
and the way you used to call me "mija."

Do you remember when my father went missing,  
like that favorite necklace of mine?  
"No lo necesitas," you said,  
"he is just a story now."  
I picked up a pen and cried  
for my bare neck  
because  
you taught me that writing heals,  
you taught me not to make homes out of people,  
and to always turn the lights off on my way out.

June afternoon  
I received my eviction notice.  
Your skin was no longer warm,  
your belly did not lift,  
and your hands seized to tremble.  
Who knows what killed you first?  
La neumonía,  
El alzhéimer,  
La amargura,  
Flipping thoughts like tarjetas de lotería,  
but this was not a game of chance.  
This is not.  
I imagine you say "now, you have a new story."

It is six a.m.  
cheeks salted with regret,  
I pick up a pen and pull  
heartstrings at my own command.  
I am tired of being left with stories.  
Please,  
turn the lights back on.



## JOAN A. VARGAS

### DE DÓNDE TÚ ERES?

Borinquen's sun abandoned her at birth  
Refusing to kiss skin stained with false privilege.  
"Te dije que mi Abuela es blanca y mi Abuelo es negro"  
Was an affirmation to her daily meditations.  
Balancing her peculiarity through proclamations  
Denying that she was sunken never sun kissed.  
Searching for a Coqui to pin on her Taino-less skin  
Hoping its sound overshadowed her pigment.

*Ko Keeee...De dónde tú eres?*

Her birth certificate read Bayamon, Puerto Rico  
Refuted by "Mija, pero come un poquito."  
A demand uttered in Spanish and English  
Triggered the invasion of a solid prediction.  
Her frail stature would be neglected  
By both morcillas y pasteles.  
Looking like a Puerto Rican was attempted yet pretentious  
But she didn't escape the question.

*Pero en verdad...De dónde tú eres?*

Her pupils dilated the city lights  
Brightening her empire state of mind.  
Borinquen viewed no vacancy in her identity  
Consumed with her New York City residency.  
Where it only resembled the island once a year  
Before the air turned cold and crisp  
Her traits didn't fit the Puerto Rican script.  
So, they asked her

*...De dónde tú eres?*

She finally responded,  
"Yo soy de Puerto Rico siempre.  
Aunque nadie lo piense."



## MARCUS CLAYTON

### ON THE BANK OF THE RIO GRANDE

Listen. The white waters are sirens:  
they are Neighborhood Watch  
with a pistol to a child's neck. Listen  
to a child's breath under darkness,  
mistaken for a shadow. Cherish  
lungs without water. Cherish the laughter  
of children before barbed wire  
pried from their ankles replaces their breaths  
with money for whites. Water listens  
to cherished Sirens seduce sailors  
with Rockwell paintings. Then a father  
shares a coffin with his daughter,  
buried by mud and still pierced by nails,  
surrounded by the warmth  
of fire without the light.  
Then extinguished. Listen.

### LESSONS FOR GROWING BOYS

I.  
Broken nose bone blood  
gelled on mucus, pooled  
over Men's bathroom tile.  
Red-splotched pink  
of medium cotton tee.

II.  
Dull doorknob  
bulges from wide  
wood like balled  
fist.

III.  
laces out  
laces out  
laces out

IV.  
Ass,  
colored plum.  
Eye sockets,  
hollowed sumps  
drained of water.

V.  
New moon—  
underneath,  
set of keys spiked  
between knuckles.



## ARIEL FRANCISCO

## AMERICAN DREAM, REFURBISHED

I

My dad says he's going to retire early  
and move back to the Dominican Republic.  
He says his social security is enough  
to get an apartment in Santo Domingo,  
says he wouldn't have to work anymore,  
says that's the point of retiring.

II

My mom says she wants to wait  
to get her full retirement and then  
move back to Guatemala.  
She says her social security is enough  
to get a little land, maybe build  
a little house, just for her.  
Says she wouldn't have to work anymore,  
says that's the point of retiring.

III

My parents ask me what my plans  
for retirement are, and only because  
I love them so, I do not laugh.

MY GRANDFATHER APPLIES FOR CITIZENSHIP  
AND DIES BEFORE HE GETS IT, 2005

Forty years as a legal resident,  
maybe something like Stockholm Syndrome.  
Blind by then, he'd seen enough  
of America's flaws to know better,  
lived through the bloody aftermath  
of its claws digging into his homeland,  
what brought him over in the first place—  
and still he wanted it,  
the paper, the title, the privilege;  
and still, one final *no*.



## KARLA CORDERO

## TWO SNAILS: A TRAGIC LOVE STORY

Snails are born with a homing instinct and will crawl slowly back  
to their motherland if moved, BBC wildlife film proves — *The Telegraph*

Out in the garden, out of rage, I broke two lovers apart,  
two slime hard-shell devils devouring their way down  
an entire head of lettuce—  
the greens born from seed only to dream big dreams  
of crisp bowls of salad, BLT's—  
so I can offer the extra leaves to the neighbors  
& call myself: goddess of harvest.

But my god it is hard to stay holy here—  
holding each creature in my hand.  
Bravest of travelers—I cannot imagine my lover and I  
split apart—*only to think: what will become of our bodies  
at the sound of silence*—  
all because of hunger, because of faith  
found in the foundation of our birthplace,  
because history's sharp knife spiraled between  
the growth of root. I place the small couple  
in a hedge hundreds of feet away knowing  
they will return. I am no god, and yet  
tomorrow I will beg myself to be a merciful one.

## LOVE LETTER TO THE FIG BEETLE

Above me in the blue sphere of day  
I see the feral work of the world.  
The sky a busy intersection—  
a traffic of bees zipping between flower heads.  
The monarchs dropping their children off  
on the leaf-ends of milkweed.  
& how can I forget the sparrows—  
their clever swoop-downs like thieves  
robbing the dead sunflower of its seeds.  
A beautiful busy & still the hustle & grace  
that adorn the sky is sliced to pieces  
by the buzzing flight of the beetle—  
clumsy pilot, propeller to nowhere, who bounces  
off trees, roof tops, gutters—  
once even crash-landed on the soft back of my neck—  
how I despise your small collision of terror.  
What I call trouble you call labor—  
demanding to be a pretty thing.  
You metallic green star of day.  
You whose locomotion of mass fist fights  
gravity to be with the birds.  
You who still charges with chaos to chase  
the smell of spoiled fruit, the rot no one  
will pick to love but you.



## CEDRIC LEIBA, JR.

### I PRAY I WON'T GET HIT

*Written in response to George Floyd's death*

I pray I won't get hit  
With depression  
I'm over it  
\*  
Too much pain  
And disappointment  
With this virus  
Conflicting sources  
Loss of jobs  
Loss of life  
I need a break  
It's too much strife  
And now I'm bait  
For someone's hate  
Black, brown or trans  
My life's in your hands  
To kill  
Ridicule  
My freedom  
Is minimal  
I'm tired  
Beat down  
"Imma fight!"  
Sit down  
'Cause nothing is changing  
Good luck with the waiting  
The walls that you form  
Will protect this new norm  
\*  
I pray I won't get hit  
By this VIRUS,  
A KNEE or a BULLET



## MARCELA RODRIGUEZ-CAMPO

### BROWN LAUGHTER

My parents broke their bodies  
For an American dream  
That never loved them.  
It loved their labor  
But never their laughter.  
They stretched muscle,  
Pulled joint out of socket,  
Forced vertebrae out of line,  
Tore flesh and fiber.  
For what?  
For an American Dream  
That never loved them.  
It loved their labor  
But never their laughter.  
And who's left laughing?  
Yet who's left toiling?  
Dark bodies with cracked skin,  
Bent and broken—  
Just to make a living,  
But never quite living.  
I won't labor my love  
I won't let America have me.  
Not this body.  
Not this mind.  
I love me  
Because I am the Immigrant's Dream,  
And I am their laughter.



## LEONARDO RUIZ

[MORNING DEW]

ever so little  
 grace // wastelands we live in  
 as if they were meant to be  
 the world's greatest tears  
 l i k e m o r n i n g d e w  
     esta rebelión on low water  
     might take a rain check on  
     for we still look back on Atlacoya  
     groping back in times of drought

después  
 de todo  
 Teótl  
 resiste

[TRAVEL GUARACHA]

*para Sylvia B.*

Sometimes  
 I wish I were a character in a travel book  
 and get to know the black seas of Iceland  
 or the awe-inspiring landscapes of Huacachina  
 or the delightful scent of a lavender field  
     far out in Valensole //  
 A veces quisiera darle la vuelta al mundo  
 and book one of those hot air balloon tours  
 in Cappadocia o en el desierto floreado de Atacama  
 and make a long-life living on how much I travel  
 BUT I guess my longing is simpler, humbler,  
     // yet more definitive  
 I rather travel around you  
 while dancing to this guaracha  
 así nomás con una vueltecita / and  
 I'll get to know the whole universe  
 vuelta y vuelta and I'll get to know  
 YOU: the whole meaning of life



## ETNA ÁVALOS

WE WILL MEET AGAIN

My double lives in another land,  
 breathes the cold winter air,  
 and her skin cracks while she listens  
 to the song of the German homeless woman.  
 Syllables like flies go around and trap her,  
 in a strange car, with a strange husband.

From her mouth unfamiliar sounds unfolding  
 like the distant murmur of the river,  
 imperfect and broken, fighting.

My double lives in English,  
 I can hear her, laughing at herself,  
 clenched fists, lost in an endless battle.  
 She picks the words that I wouldn't  
 and walks the streets in snow boots,  
 meaningless swearing, alive.

Grey and white eclipse her eyes,  
 the big secret of those prairies,  
 an/other land: homeland?

My double wakes up in the middle of the night,  
 dreaming my dreams, our mother, our father,  
 she follows my borderless memories  
 and my thoughts: "Pronto volveremos".  
 She dresses up and drinks the foreign moon:  
 she knows she is meant to meet me in Mexico.



## K. VAN DAM

### THE DAZZLING WEBS

Sometimes I see the dazzling edge,  
A line of light,  
Slicing the path ahead.  
Gossamer and insubstantial,  
Yet it bars my way.

I can keep going,  
Pretending my eyes don't see  
The way the light catches,  
Blinding me,  
Pulse charged with imminent dread.

The threads clinging to me as I pass,  
Harmless,  
A whisper of disquiet,  
Affecting me,  
As the wisps of their untethered influence tickle  
In a way I can never fully brush loose.

I can avoid them,  
Pull up short when I spot them,  
Shape my life around all the places they are not  
Which defines all the places  
I can never be.

Instead,  
I follow my fancy,  
Press on here,  
Recoil there,  
Threads catching in my hair and on my face,  
Dragged through my life until I am  
A web of missed moments and concessions.



## JULIÁN DAVID BAÑUELOS

### ΦΑΟΣ

—These walls are very much alive—  
Spoken at but never through  
Cracked and graffitied  
Torn at but never down  
*I let this happen*

Watched my brown eyes  
Pulled from their frames  
Felt hammer toes plucked  
Blow after blow against  
This blood-stained chest  
Kept quiet while this mouth

Of mine was stolen  
Packed tight con tierra  
Soiled with sangre  
—These walls are very much alive—

Climbed through and over  
Pure and untouched  
Torn down and out

*I let this happen*  
Watched scavengers take,  
Every inch of me

Turned into miracle mile  
Felt my navel sprout thistle  
Kept these hands of mine  
hidden for your arrival  
It's almost as if you knew  
I haven't seen light in a while  
Hasn't been bright in a while



## YOLANY MARTÍNEZ

Translated by Janet N. Gold

## THE LAST HORIZON

Today is the last horizon  
 I write to you.  
 The last echo I exhale  
 in these foreign lands.  
 There is no further distance  
 than the shape of your back closing the door  
 the dull thud of wood  
 the sound of metal clicking shut.

I have always said:  
 This story is not a story without your laughter  
 without your way of being  
 without your voice splitting into firewood to frighten  
 away the cold  
 without the thread of words your mouth wove to quiet fear.

You have always known that the shield of my silence  
 is not made of iron  
 nor is my paucity of words a cliff of dry branches.  
 You always said that memory weaves us together  
 that it is the way back, the crosswalk of time.

I have come to believe all this  
 and I have learned a different way of being with you.  
 I breathe . . . and  
 all that is you comes alive in me.  
 From this side of the door  
 your voice is here in my ear. I breathe.



## JAVIER VILLARREAL

## THE WILLOWS

The willows sway along the river  
 step into shallows with open arms  
 and whisper from time to time.

A measured humming hovers in the breeze  
 while *pateros* drift across the sleeping serpent  
 pushing hidden shadows off the *carrizales*.

A flock of house sparrows pierces the obsidian night  
 chasing feeding fields on the other side.

Camouflaged harriers perched on *mezquites*  
 pounce on them between first strands of light.

Tangled in fear, a handful scuffle away,  
 feathers flutter on the spines of *nopaleras*.

The day bleeds beyond the sunrise  
 and *alas blancas* echo another song.

Startled, the willows shudder  
 the river scurries downstream  
 the wind scrambles away.

Peregrines drift the free-flowing skies.  
*Coyotes* crack the stone-cold silence.

All wait . . . wait . . .  
 wait for another day.



## JACOB ANTHONY RAMIREZ

### TAMALES

*For Adolpho Soto Tafoya*

*You know why Xicanos eat tamales for Christmas?* This is how abuelo starts the holidays. We laugh though we would guess his joke was true in the Depression. Scarce enough food for the eight working children: the youngest girl wrapped in blankets, buried. We talk and mix the masa by hand, listen to gossip. *Oy! He died? She re-married?* Then, grandma assembles and assigns us our jobs. *Kids on corn husks. Spread the masa. Not too thick or too thin.* When my mom fusses, *Your auntie, psssh. No help at all. Nada!*  
Abuelo says, *Get it? Something to unwrap.*  
We haven't made tamales since they passed.

### LA BRUJA BLANCA

*For Helen Espinoza Tafoya*

*¡Pa' 'riba!* My nostrils rise to the trail of jalapeños and the sacrifice of cilantro: a black bowl sits on my tía's tablecloth. She says, *Mira, mijo. Chile won't hurt you.* She smiles and digs her finger into the salsa. She sucks her nail and laughs with garlic starred in her teeth and stands like a grave digger over dirt in a blue November moon. *Tía, what ever happened to your husband?* With a hand on her hip, she arches her eyebrow. *I ate him whole and spat his bones outside.* *¡Pa' 'fuera!* I blew his soul to the wind.  
Outside, her terracotta chimes jangle light and a slur opens her shutters with a breeze.



## JANETTE VALENZO

### CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?

Can I dive headfirst down your throat,  
or will you choke on all I am?  
Can I backstroke through your bloodstream all the way  
to your heart,  
or will we always be slightly offbeat?  
Can I curl up inside your stomach and spoon feed you  
my mother's recipes,  
or will you starve us of attention?  
Can I dance in circles in your lungs and be swept up and  
down, in and out,  
or will I blow this up before it has a chance to breathe?

I can make myself at home  
in the creases of your dry elbows,  
the knots in your upper back,  
the pus ready to pop on the pimples you hate but I love,  
in the swelling of your feet after a long day,  
in your bit-down-to-the-cuticles nails that never scratch  
when exploring my inner thoughts,  
your abdomen folds folding right into mine after  
eating me up,  
and in our knees bumping into each other as we try  
to sleep.

Can your body handle mine,  
or will it reject this donor's heart and transplant me  
somewhere else?

I don't care for the glitter  
the gold  
the picturesque poetry people want.

This body is meant  
for  
for  
windows open, lights on, clothes off,  
food stuck in between teeth,  
sweat and noises and hot breath  
overbites and understanding  
for  
you and you and you  
and me.

Can you slip me on like your favorite pair of Docs,  
or will you eventually wear me down  
until I am nothing  
but a pair of hands  
holding onto a memory?



## MICHELLE GARCIA FRESCO

## HOOP DREAMS

*Inspired by Clint Smith*

Luis says I got hoops for days. What he means is  
you can tell a lot about a girl by the size of her earrings.

Says I got a hole in my chest.  
Wants to know why all Latinas are the same.

Wants to know what we hide in our hoops  
to have all this attitude. & you know what they say.

The bigger the hoop, the looser my hips swing.  
When I dance my hoops so big they salsa in the air

or in circles. My hoops is circles  
or cycles of survival. My mother says she had hoops

As big as my heart. As big as my mouth.  
Says I don't know when to shut them.

Says hoops are hollow from the inside out  
*you can see right through them,*

*but no one ever sees the weight.* My hoops never wait.  
Always swing when my hands talk.

Always got something slick to say  
Always have the best intentions & the worst patience.

My hoops is impatient. Be all attitude & acrylics.  
& yeah they're mine cause I paid for them.

& they as real, as my refills.  
My hoops be

A No Net  
Above the Rim

Finesse.



Make the boys on the block wanna ball up  
& ball out. Make them wanna shoot their shot—

& you know, my pick up game nice,  
even when i'm not. My hoops is consistent.

Always clinging on to skin. Always trying to hold  
all the people I love them. & yeah maybe all Latinas

are the same, just the holes in our chest.  
The targets on either side of our neck.

But tell me a story of survival  
that did not come full circle.

Where a woman is not both the beginning  
and the end.

## MARIA PALITACHI

KURDISTAN, YOU'RE BEING CRUSHED  
BY A MEMO

And now  
Whom might they answer to?  
So, tell me, who signed that memo?

Amidst black coins  
And the loafing leisure, they sign  
*The Red Dead Redemption*

And so,

Who authored that memo  
In which they machine-gunned the streets  
And turned the thoughts to dust?

Jobs in Kurdistan  
Have become run-for-your-life  
In the wreckage picked by vultures.

The music of rockets  
Trains them to climb down, run  
And be willing to crumble.

—In the arena of humanity  
They rip families, neighborhoods,  
And a city apart. . . .

Today, yesterday and tomorrow, who will be able to  
Explain to those children who had parents  
That we don't know how they're called  
Or their family names?

They've incurred a historic debt of carts  
Without donkeys and of donkeys without carts.

Who made out that memo, carrying stories behind  
The chador and a Christ lost among the nails,  
The wood, and a skin that cries to go back  
To the town square  
In the Middle East?

How will they be able to cross the Liberation  
Bridge if their wings are clipped?  
Who signed?  
Damn it,  
Who sent it?

While Baghdad suffers from high blood pressure  
Through the veins of oil, they're signing two  
Memos of political chess in the North.

And then what?  
Oh, now  
I get it.

We know who trademarked that memo.  
And now . . . ?  
—And now what?

The pandemic is something else.



## WESSO HERRERA

### ALMS FOR US

You have morals  
You have beliefs  
Like sharing is caring  
Or, money isn't everything  
You can't buy happiness  
It's what's on the inside that matters

You believe this  
You really do

And you don't care about your morals  
Everything you do says so  
It's ok, I understand  
You're a good person

What can you do?  
It's complicated  
I know, I know  
I mean, why should you have to pay?  
You work hard (not too hard)  
You have skills (common skills)  
You're special (like everyone else)  
And you've earned everything you have,  
Isn't that right?  
You've earned it so you deserve it  
And everyone else deserves whatever they have  
It's that simple

It's ok, I know you don't actually believe that  
You're a good person, right?  
Sharing is caring,  
Charity is important,  
Philanthropy, donations,  
Etc.  
That's what you believe in

You don't actually believe  
That working some meaningless job  
Acquiring meaningless money  
For meaningless ends  
Is the only thing that makes you deserving

That if not  
You do not deserve a home.  
You do not deserve food.  
You do not deserve health.  
You do not deserve.  
What  
Money  
Can  
Buy

You know Money  
Is the only guarantee  
Ensuring  
Basic living standards  
Basic needs  
Human rights  
All of that

All of that  
Because of some stupid fucking job

I know you don't believe this  
It's ok, I know  
Keep telling me how much more deserving you are  
And how undeserving those lazy moochers are  
All the hundreds of millions of them  
And how much the inside matters,  
How little money truly means  
And keep giving your spare change,  
Your amazing charity  
Paying so you can feel better

You.  
Deserve it



## LINDSEY J. MEDINA

## LO VEO

Grandpa died on a Tuesday afternoon.  
His death sounded like broken breaths  
and the constant clink of the ceiling fan chain.  
Beneath three cobijas, his bones chattered  
like the gravel beneath his wheelchair.

*Espera. Estoy listo.*

*Lo veo. Lo veo. Lo veo.*

Grandma hasn't looked at me in a year  
because I have his face—his crooked nose,  
hollow cheeks, thin lips and our front left tooth,  
commandeering every photograph.  
All she sees: a mouth she can't kiss,  
a sharp chin she can't rest her head under.

What does it mean to carry the face of a dead man?

I don't ask this question, not because I'm afraid  
of the answer, but because she used to cook us  
the same breakfast—pan-fried hot dogs, scrambled  
eggs, tortillas, warm like an embrace.

She'd hold my face in her hands,  
trace my chin, and grin, saying,

*Lo veo. Lo veo. Lo veo.*



## DON CELLINI

## ORANGE BLOSSOMS FROM GRANADA

Once  
it didn't matter.  
Once  
it woke him up at night.

Whisper:  
honey thigh,  
dark love,  
*mi paloma.*

Flee like the sound  
of shattering  
glass.  
Alone?

But what  
would happen?  
But no.

I cannot tell  
you my name.  
It's the same  
as yours.

The photo  
nearly faded.  
A cloud  
of gunpowder.

70 years. A love  
letter, a sonnet,  
orange blossoms  
from Granada.



*in memory of Juan Ramirez de Luca.*

\**Sonnets of Dark Love*, Federico García Lorca  
translation by Cellini

## LAYLA BENITEZ-JAMES

### PARENT MATERIAL

When I was angry, I let the ivy my father brought me die. His mother put ginger in her suitcase—rootsmuggled from Hawaii. Forty years and her ginger lives on in my father's garden. My compost is warm in my hands.

This compost is warm like my baby is warm and sweet with transformation. Muscle shell crab claw coffee filter citrus peel lemon wedge from my father's gin and tonic. Good dirt and leaf lace glowing spiders and soft slate woodlice.

There is earth behind his ears.  
In his navel, filth.

Father says to *cook the roux until it is between my color and yours* and then  
imagine a city where there are no fathers  
as we know fathers—streets of sub marine bright pollen.



Nothing is finer than the spent soil shaken from the rootbound body. I work my fingers in to detangle swallowed stones and bits of tile. No sand is sweeter, warmer. There is no sacred thing. Not that I have found.

There were three wise men.  
They were all my father.

---

## JIMENA LARRAGUIVEL

### I STAY

I need space.  
You say, 'a divorce?!'  
I say 'it's just space.'

Where can I run to?  
A place where to hide, a place where to cry,  
a place that is safe to run to on demand.

Financial support,  
career support,  
divorce is far worse than the death of us both.

So those are the reasons I stay.  
I wish it was love.  
I grieve it's not love.  
But it's not.

So, I stay.  
I want to just go but I stay.

### A MOTHER TODAY

Four decades ago  
a baby's surrounded by love.  
A baby surrounded by not just one mother  
but many all filling the cup.

Four decades ahead  
a baby's surrounded by love.  
A baby surrounded by only one mother,  
who's failing, struggling, alone.



## PAOLA AUTHIEVRE

## MEMORY

There are women who mend the word at the foot of their dead  
choose the pieces of their missing history  
and give them a face, a name.

There are women capable of facing death  
of challenging the brevity of knowing themselves alive  
while the moon turns to ash.

There are women who dig between the cracks  
and time stops in the syllables  
of the names of those missing.

The light pierces the mended halves  
but they bind them again with blood,  
with saliva and clay and once again at the feet  
of their dead they tie them to their memory.

## VERMOUTH

At the depth of your gaze  
the silence spilled  
the longing and its fish  
killer covered by the night  
my mouth has  
thirst for your blood  
thirst for your desires  
thirst for your death.

## SEVEN

One day my tongue will travel  
the edge of a word never spoken  
a god will penetrate the shadows  
and with his fish he will sow  
the silence.



## ELIZABETH LLEONART

## ESPUMITA RISING

Born with the thirst of voyagers,  
Silent when strong, loud when weak,  
They call us la gente de llantos,  
And it's true, we're always "¡Ay Dios mío!"  
And "¡Ay caramba!"  
Because just like the espumita in our coffee,  
We've always got things rising from the bottom.

Fierce in the eye with knees on the floor,  
Fury and humility tangled together  
Like rosaries at the bottoms of purses  
Always a reach away,  
A reach away...  
But Cuba is not a reach away.

Bailadores, la canción nunca basta,  
Between laughs and swinging hips,  
Absorbing the music like a call to battle,  
Because lo comido y lo bailado no te lo puede  
quitar nadie,  
No one can take that away.

Sonadores, always caught up in a dream,  
Con Dios todo se puede,  
The mantra we hold onto when there's nothing left,  
When the world sizzles away into clouds and sea,  
And the chance at being free.

Luchadores, the people who never give up,  
Lives who suffered and fought,  
Who came up from the depths with a story to tell,  
The ones who pushed through hell, to say one thing:  
Pa'lante, pa'lante,  
Siempre pa'lante, mija.





# JORGE MARÍN

Aire

Air

2014

Bronce a la cera perdida

Lost-wax bronze casting

154 x 108 x 92 cm



## Jorge Marín

With over 25 years of artistic work, he has successfully entered into Mexico's artistic scene and has become a representative of international figurative sculpture. The bronze sculptures of Jorge Marín reflect the intrinsic strength and force that emanate from its creation and allows him to construct dynamic bodies full of movement, which challenge gravity and rotate in space supported on one point.

His work represents the struggle between the coldness of bronze and the diverse emotions that his subjects evocate. The perfect balance of the equilibrists and his winged figures have become his particular seal. Another notable trait in his work is the mask, an attempt to depersonalize his sculptures and become another medium of expression of a body that contains universal symbols in itself.

He has dabbled in various sculptural dimensions, ranging from miniature to monumental format. He has exhibited both in Mexico and abroad, seizing public space, generating an unprecedented dialogue between the artwork and the

viewer, an equal part of the monumentality of a pair of wings that accomplices fantastic characters integrated within public squares worldwide.

He has participated in over 300 collective and individual exhibitions. His work has been exhibited in galleries and museums in France, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Germany, Belgium, Hungary, Romania, Costa Rica, Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala, Canada, the United States, England, Russia, Belgium, Denmark, Latvia, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Sweden, Mauritius, Japan, Germany, and Norway.

His *Wings*, originally displayed on Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, have been exhibited on public roads in Mexico City, Berlin, Tel-Aviv, Los Angeles, Madrid, San Jose, Singapore, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Nagoya, Hong Kong, Cairo, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Ankara, Berlin, California, Madrid, Beirut, Oslo, and Toledo, becoming an iconic reference of his work.

Jorge Marín's art penetrates the lives of everyday people, transforming them into unique moments. It changes the urban landscape to convey and tell their stories and those of others.

#### JORGE MARÍN FOUNDATION

The Jorge Marín Foundation was created in 2015 to make proposals of a social nature that, through art, invite reflection, interaction, and the restoration of the social fabric. The foundation promotes the implementation of projects at a national and international level to share culture with the community, emphasizing social participation, recognizing and appropriating public spaces, and building a different life experience. It seeks to directly impact the wellness of young people, indigenous communities, women, migrant girls and boys, and refugees, among other groups in need of visibility in a situation of vulnerability.

Using the iconography of Jorge Marín as a vehicle, actions are developed to benefit society through social projects. The projects include carrying out workshops, the intervention of spaces, and activities to support and raise awareness of current issues that affect today's society, such as migration, social inclusion, gender violence, and the environment's protection. It also includes academic training to generate a space for dialogue, reflection, and academic production around art, society, and its problems. And finally, through exhibition management, it organizes exhibition projects in the public space to strengthen social interaction from the recovery of coexistence spaces, bringing art closer to daily life to use it for the benefit of society and as a tool for peace. At the same time, it enriches the population's artistic experience, increasing the cultural offer in Mexico and other countries.



Caballo  
Horse  
2016  
Bronze a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
104 x 39 x 130 cm



Aire  
Air  
2014  
Bronce a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
154 x 108 x 92 cm

Ángel con libro roto  
Broken Angel with Book  
2014  
Bronce a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
137 x 11 x 52 cm





CR 17  
CR 17  
2014  
Bronze a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
127 x 117 x 28 cm

Animus Tripartita  
Threefold Soul  
2012  
Bronze a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
67 x 77 x 181 cm



Guangzhou  
Guangzhou  
2016  
Bronce a la cera perdida  
Lost-wax bronze casting  
76 x 30 cm





# IRVING CANO

Zandunga,  
2020  
Jalisco, Mexico



## Irving Cano

In the past decade, Irving Nayvet Cano Gomez, also just known as Irving Cano, has quickly established himself as one of Mexico's leading muralists. The magnificent colors and unique strokes bring life into the artist's work and lures in those who set their eyes on his creations, emblazoned with life and culture.

On August 21, 1988, Irving was born in Matías Romero, a Zapotec community in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. Despite his young age and self-taught beginnings as a plastic artist, Irving has mastered a new style of muralism that captures both esthetic virtuosity and passion—a mixture of classical finesse and modern boldness.

*"Art can change the perception of people for the common good."*

As a young 16-year-old adolescent, Irving began creating urban art with the influence of graffiti. Without any knowledge about painting but with a gifted creative notion, he began modeling clay figures he developed during his

infancy in a unique way. Throughout the years, Irving began perfecting his technique. He currently focuses on neo-muralism or urban art, where he highlights majestic qualities of his Zapotec culture, which is displayed in public spaces for entire communities to enjoy. With the implementation of realism and hyperrealism, he is able to capture the legacy of his ancestry in a new and remarkable way.

Irving has presented his work in his homeland, the Isthmus, as well as in Morelos, Ciudad de Oaxaca, Guerrero, Queretaro, Merida, Campeche, Quintana Roo, Puebla, Tabasco, Jalisco and Guerrero, to mention a few. His work has also been featured abroad in Canada, the United States, United Arab Emirates, Jamaica, as well as museums and galleries. Recently, he has created a mural in Kingston, Jamaica.

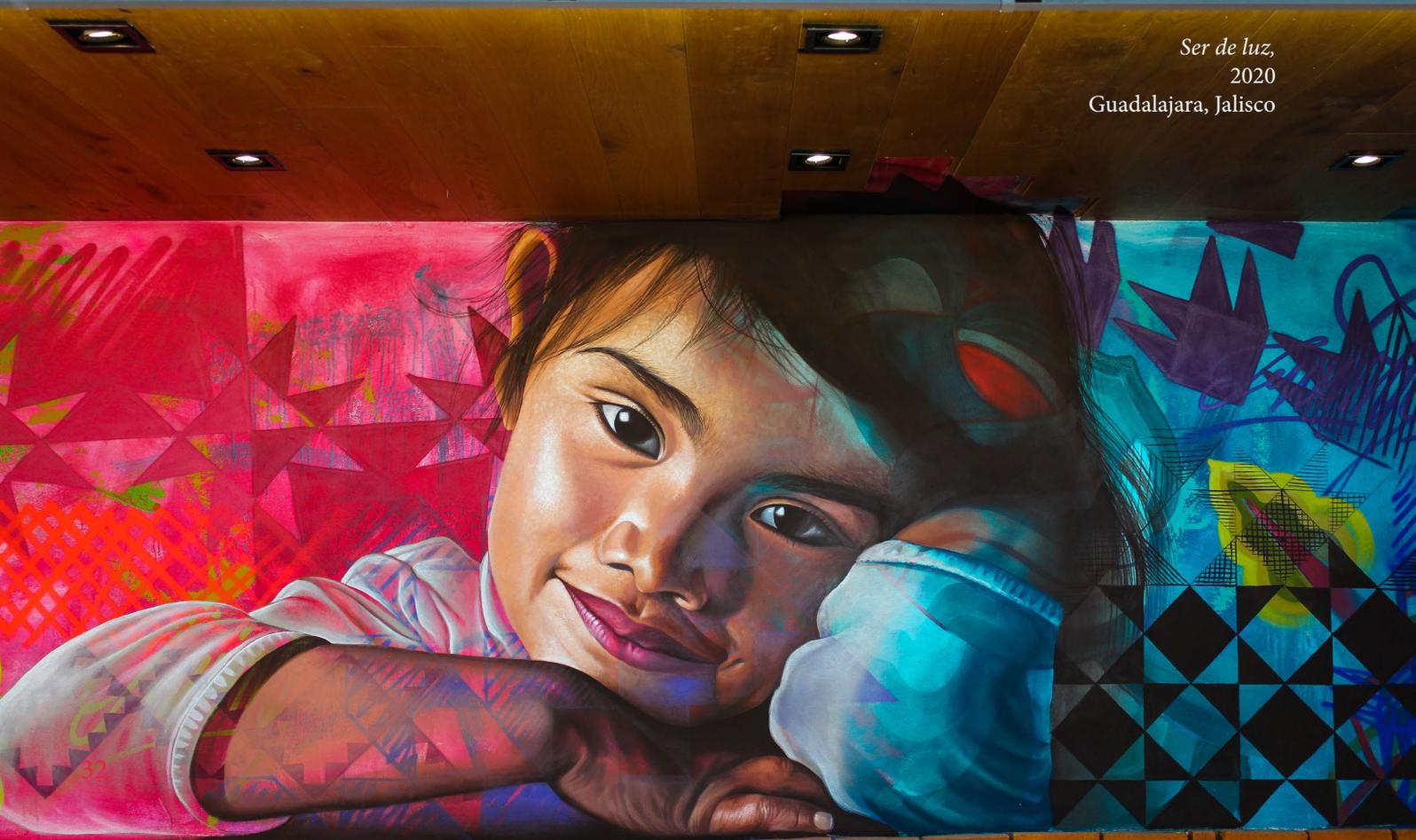
Irving Cano's goal is to show the world the richness of his origins through his art.

*Nangui (Madre Tierra),*  
2020  
Huautulco, Oaxaca



*Armando Gamero*

*Ser de luz,*  
2020  
Guadalajara, Jalisco





*Na'Elva,*  
2020  
Oaxaca, Mexico



*Este es mi Corazón Istmeño,*  
2017  
Whistler, Canada

A surreal landscape featuring a large, pale planet with prominent rings, resembling Saturn, dominating the upper half of the frame. The planet is set against a teal, hazy sky. Below the planet, a rugged, rocky terrain with various mountain peaks and a prominent cliff face is visible. The overall color palette is muted, consisting of teal, grey, and brown tones.

# FICTION

## A SMILE

by ANA LLURBA

You press the red button that says “Request Stop” and the bus stops at the next stop. You go down, look to the left and then to the right to check that no one is coming and you cross the cycle road. In the portal, a lady with a crumpled pink overcoat is sweeping the floor of the building’s reception. As soon as she sees you looking for the key in your bag, she throws the broom to the ground and runs to the door. She greets you by pronouncing your long name of Polish descent without skipping a single consonant and displaying a broad smile without separating her lips. You do not know her at all and you do not understand how she can know your name and your last name if you had never exchanged with her anything more than a diplomatic morning greeting. Since you’re late, you can not delay thinking about it.

You go up to the elevator. You press the “Third floor” button. You stop at the door. You ring the bell and the receptionist opens the door with a remote control. When you cross the door, she greets you from the other side of the table and jumps up from her chair. She approaches, touches your back and asks you about the Australian little parrot that died last month. You tell her it’s fine. You do not mind lying to her because she does not usually speak to you more than to ask you if you want to share the purchase of a pool number once a week. So you don’t need her to remember you of your bad luck with pets.

First was Chumi, your turtle. The dented shell with its legs, those miniature dinosaur hooves still in motion, that was the last thing you saw of it in the neighbor’s shovel that lifted it from the street and deposited it in a consortium bag after it was rolled up by a car. Then it was Pelu, the kitten, who fell off your balcony on a fourth floor. His little hairy skull slammed into the empty bottles of a butane salesman just down the street. Then it was the Australian little parrot that died choked with a piece of millet cracker, before you even had time to choose a name. And finally, that little orange fish that Estelita gave you. But the fishes always die, so they do not count. You just had tried animals from earth, air and water but you had no luck.

Luck. “Luck is not luck” you have read but don’t remember where. “Luck is the place where preparation will find its chance.” You felt that you were ready to take something bigger to your house, something that needed more than sun, water and, that could take care of itself and not accidentally thrown on the balcony. That’s what you thought when you listened to the veterinarian’s advice. A

man a little shorter than you and who always blushed when you showed up there. You were already prepared for luck to ring at your bell. But the only thing that was heard at that time was the doorbell of the office where you worked. The receptionist let it ring for a while. Then you remember that you are arriving half an hour late, like every day, so you turn right in a hurry and walk down a long corridor.

At the end is your office, which has four desks with their four computers. You sit, finally, at your table by the window. The roof of the pizzeria next door shines with the first rays of morning sun. While turning on the computer, you look at the nails of the right hand. You wonder where those crests of earth must have come from. You clean them with dissimulation, with the nails of the fingers of the other hand. Although a monkey can do your job, you think that it is not so bad to work in an office, after all you can even clean your nails without anyone noticing. Then you discover on your desk a couple of notes written with markers that you have not written:

“I no longer need that report of sales for the last quarter that I had asked for. You can take the rest of the week off.” “You’re the greatest. You could keep my stapler.”

“As you re-read and try to guess who has left you these notes stuck in the mountains of papers on your desk, the head of production, a redheaded woman who sits on the other end of the office, announces aloud that it is coffee time. You do not usually drink coffee, just an infusion in your house in the morning before leaving. Although you think everyone knows that, you feel watched and when you look up from the computer, there are six pairs of eyes standing there, watching you.

The head of production, the intern who always lets the boss know when you are late and the clerk, bald and with a stabile look. The three people with whom you share the air and your opinions on the weather forecast for eight hours a day, forty hours a week, one hundred and sixty hours a month. They are joined by the receptionist and the cleaning lady who right now are walking through the door of the office.

They smile with discipline while they wait for you to stop cleaning your nails to accompany them to have coffee in the kitchen. As you walk in front of them down the hall, you hear that the head of production insults and pushes the intern against the wall. They stand next to you, rub your shoulders, as if escorting you to the kitchen. There, the intern is ahead of everyone and gives you her

rice cakes with diet chocolate. Then, the clerk offers you the only chair in the kitchen. When you're sitting down, the CFO comes running and complains that no one has warned him. He picks up his impeccable trousers and then kneels before you and offers to massage your feet.

All these people ignored you for the last five years and now they look like the unicorns that hang from a carousel: they only have a big smile for you. You wonder if something serious has happened. Maybe all your family has died as a result of a massive intoxication with homemade mayonnaise last Sunday that you could not go to your grandmother's house because you were at home working the distribution and sales reports for the last quarter of the year. Or maybe you've won the lottery and now you're the richest woman in the world. But you immediately remember that although every week the receptionist asks you if you want to participate in the purchase of a pool number, you always say no. At that moment, the IT who grumbles whenever you ask him to reconfigure the email program, raises a cup of coffee and offers a toast to your health. You get up from the chair with a jump and tell everyone, raising your voice, to the brink of hysteria, that today is not your birthday but no one seems to care. They're all too worried about having fun. Then the cleaning lady takes out of the fridge a strawberry and cream cake that has your name written on it with candies.

Then you run out and lock yourself in the bathroom and close the door with the metal pin. You wash your face and look at yourself in the mirror. You take air and release it. You inhale and exhale several times. Your newly recovered heart rate is interrupted by the knuckles of several fists knocking on the door. They ask if you are okay, if you need help, toilet paper or a portion of the cake. They boo to the one who asked you it. You let the water flow so they do not hear that you've put down the toilet lid, you've climbed over and you're opening the bathroom skylight. You pick up your hair a little, you raise your skirt up to your knees, you put the bag in shoulder strap, you lean in the water tank and jump out.

When you reach the fire escape (yes, in the office where you work you have one of those fire escapes that are very Hollywood style) you realize that you hooked the bag in the window. They are beating the door. When you unhook it, you start to run down the stairs. You get tangled up with your own legs, tripping, and rolling a couple of steps down. You hear the screams coming from below. You stand up again and discover that the general manager with her impeccable white American jacket and her eternal sunglasses on her head greets you from the street.

You greet her with a forced smile. You watch your movements from the corner of your eye as you jump to a large container of debris to escape on the opposite side of the street. But when you fall you support the whole weight on one leg. The pain rises from the heel to your thighs as if an army of zombie ants will nail your jaws to the bone. You

get out of the container as you can. You rattled fast enough to get the general manager away. But at the end of the street, she reaches you and rushes over you. She embraces you by the shoulders and with a big smile in which she displays his millionaire orthodontics she offers to take you home. She tells you that your latest model car is parked in the corner.

As soon as you get to her car, you panic again so you run away. When you cross the street without looking at the traffic light, a pizza delivery motorcycle hits you.

When you open your eyes again, you're in the hospital. You see your right leg plastered. You try to look at the sides, but you can not move the neck because you have the same driving ability as Robocop thanks to a rigid plastic collar. There are several wreaths and teddy bears in a corner. You are allergic to pollen and you discover how painful a sneeze can be for your plastered neck. Then you hear a murmur from outside. The head of production, the receptionist, the IT, the intern, the clerk, the general manager and the CFO squeeze their bodies to enter. You close your eyes and you hope you're still in a nightmare. But when you open them, they are still there.

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*“...smiles...the only gesture  
that everyone devotes to  
you lately.”*

---

Then you lower your eyelids, so they think you're still asleep. But it's late, somebody turns on the light, everyone is piling around you and you begin to besiege with courtesy questions. You do not want to talk to anyone. You watch carefully the plaster of your leg. Someone has drawn several clouds like little brain cells delineated with a celestial marker and has written:

“You do not have to learn to love yourself. We love you more.”

This is like being in heaven, you think. But this must be the wrong paradise. They beat the pizza delivery motorcyclist next door to the office. The one who could not dodge you in time when you tried to escape them, across the street running. They kicked him so hard that now you had him by your side, on the other stretcher. You remember nebulously a giant male nurse shouting and imposing on them the only authority to which they replied: brute force. You think about it half a second longer and your head starts to hurt. Then a nurse comes in with a tray of food. But you

are not hungry even though you have not eaten for hours.

The nurse smiles at you and this does not surprise you because it is the only gesture that everyone devotes to you lately. Then everyone rushes over the nurse to see the plaque. The general manager says that the smile that is stranded between the padded cramps of your brain is very much like the perfect orthodontics of her. But the others contradict it, and everyone starts to complain that the smile is theirs. As they discuss pushing and shouting between them, the motorcyclist wakes up on the next stretcher and asks for a glass of water. No one heeded.

You take advantage of that moment of distraction in which they are arguing between them and you ask the nurse to pass you a crutch that is near the door.

But when everyone sees that you sit in bed and you are ready to take the crutch, the general manager brings you an electric wheelchair. Then, among all try to lift your body from the bed to move to it. You discover that you must have a few internal bruises because every time someone puts a finger on some part of your body, it hurts. You start yelling and they return you to bed. The financial director has made his way among the others and starts to massage you on the left foot, the one you do not have plastered. Meanwhile, the clerk puts a spoon with porridge in front of his mouth.

You ask if anyone told your family. They look at each other with a surprised face and say in chorus: "No, but do not worry, no one can love you more than we do." While the trainee accommodates the pillows in the back, the head of production picks up your urinal filled with a dark and odorous matter.

Although your neck hurts a lot, you can not help it: you start crying. The motorcyclist watches you. He has stopped asking for a glass of water. Everyone looks at you with a surprised face. You feel guilty, that relentless social machinery is beginning to operate within you. But you're still crying, with a hysterical cry, incubated by bewilderment. The receptionist fights with the general manager to dry her tears. The computer man goes ahead, and you press your face with a tissue so hard that more than absorbing tears seems to try to take away an indelible makeup.

A while later, the nurse enters the room again. Brings a tray with a syringe with an important dose of muscle relaxant. She puts the syringe in your arm. You fall asleep a few minutes later. You wake up a couple of hours later. It is night. There is no one in the room. You remember in dreams the same giant ambulance nurse threatening everyone to go to sleep in the waiting room. You grab the crutch. You sit on the bed, although your neck still hurts. Without making a noise, you lean on the crutch and stand up. With the opposite hand to the plastered foot, you wrap yourself in half with a small blanket on top of the robe. You sit in the electric wheelchair. It has a small board with arrows. You point him forward. And then back. Again forward. You turn on the chair and you leave the room.

You verify that there is no one in the hall, and you

leave. You increase your speed as you approach the waiting room. You walk like a plane in flaring flight dodging a nurse on duty. The head of production watches you pass, rises from the chair and runs to you. He takes you by the arm, you bite her and spit a few millimeters of skin and hairs that remain between your teeth. You go out the main entrance of the hospital, you hear that they call you by your name but you do not stop.

When you stop listening you turn, as you can, to check that they are already far. Then, when you look forward again, you are in the middle of a multi-lane avenue. And all of a sudden you have a trunk pouncing on you. But you do not care. After all what you've been through, nothing can kill you anymore.

As soon as you get home, you find your kitten, Pelu, with a patch of gauze on the skull. It has Chumi, your turtle with the dented shell, cornered. The turtle has hidden under a piece of furniture on which you have the fish tank wrapped in a greenish liquid because you never remember to change the water. You scream at Pelu to get away from the turtle, and then the Australian little parrot that still has no name begins to hum from its cage.

Then the phone rings. It's the nurse. She asks you if you are okay, if you need anything, if you want she take you some medicine to your house, if you she send the giant male nurse to help you. After saying a resounding "no," you hang up the phone.

In spite of her disheveled and pitiful appearance, your kitten Pelu watches you. Next to her, the turtle Chumi has unfolded all her brief leathery neck and also looks you in the face. The orange fish has its nose stuck to the greenish glass of the fish tank. And the Australian little parrot keeps the eyelids wide open. It also looks at you closely. Gradually, that smile, the same as that of your office mates and hospital staff, starts to appear between their animal lips.



Ana Llorba was born in Córdoba, Argentina, 1980. She published *Este es el momento exacto en que el tiempo empieza a correr* (Antonio Colinas Young Poetry Award, 2015) *La puerta del cielo* (novel, 2018) *Constelaciones familiares* (short stories, 2020). Some of her work has been translated into English, Portuguese, Italian, German, Polish and Lithuanian.

## HUNGRY.

by CHRISTINA QUINTANA (CQ)

I go to McDonald's to meet homeless people. It makes me feel like a humanitarian. I buy a guy a value meal and suddenly I'm the Pope.

I live near an enormous public shelter that goes mostly unnoticed. The nearby McDonald's is basically the cafeteria thanks to its proximity, prices, and seating. Because I appear rich and white—though I am neither—it's only a matter of time after I enter that I'm approached. Sometimes I carry a book, or a briefcase, sometimes nothing at all. I stand and wait, peruse the menu—as if seriously contemplating a Big Mac versus a Crispy Chicken Sandwich. Truth be told, I'm a vegetarian. (Those documentaries really get to your head.)

I count: one Mississippi, two Mississippi... and without fail: "Sir. Sir?" Someone approaches. Usually a man. Further proof that men aren't afraid to ask for what they want, even if it's a small fry off the dollar menu.

I make eye contact. He's an older black man with a deep complexion and a thinning tuft of white hair. He uses a walker half-wrapped in electrical tape and seems genuine—they aren't always. "I'm pretty hungry and was wondering whether you could help me get one of those burgers off the menu."

"Sure," I reply.

He smiles warmly. "That's awfully nice of you."

"I like to think if I was in your situation, you'd do the same for me." It's true— even if this is my canned response.

"You want the whole meal?" The cashier asks. I crane my neck back and the man nods vigorously.

I look to the cashier with a twinkle in my eye. "The whole meal."

\*

I have one rule for these interactions. I insist that the individuals I order for finish their entire meal with me. I sit politely across from them. Mostly, people don't mind—a free burger is a free burger. However, this man is suspicious.

"Why do you want to sit with me?" "I'd like to get to know you."

"I don't really go for that sort of thing..." I take

off my cap, revealing my tight, dark curls. Suddenly he examines my face, my features, sees me differently. I'm an ally now. "No offense, brother."

"No! No. I just want to talk, hear about your day." He eyes me curiously, but doesn't make any more objections as I park in the plastic booth across from him.

Homeless people don't judge me. They don't ask questions. They don't mind that I didn't visit my father on his deathbed, or that I cheated on my ex-girlfriend while she treated malnourished children in Ghana. They're just grateful for the meal.

Usually my guests devour their food before I can recall what I ordered them. Not this guy. He unwraps the burger like it's the greatest gift ever received, folding the edges of its paper wrapper into a perfect square. When he lifts the sandwich, he can barely manage the weighty hunks of beef and bun between his hands, but is careful to keep the burger intact—not to drop even a piece of tomato, a sliver of lettuce. He savors each bite of his double patties, closing his eyes with each mouthful, gratitude written all over his expression. He may as well be eating a filet mignon. I suddenly wonder about his last real meal.

"Don't you wanna tell me about your day?"

"No, not really." He offers calmly between bites.

"I won't judge, and I'm happy to listen."

He doesn't even look up as he sets into his French fries. One-by-one he lovingly lays the fries onto the unwrapped paper, squeezes a line of ketchup across each, and delicately places them into his mouth. All lined up, the skinny excuses for potatoes look like images of body bags from old war photos. Is this a ritual; is he a vet?

I've heard loads of stories from these guys. Stabbings, overdoses, lost loves, spouses, and children, robberies, escapes from Bellevue. I live for this shit. I'm not a big reader. I don't have cable, I don't have Netflix. This is real life—and even better, it's not mine.

"You sure there's nothing you wanna talk about?"

"Nope. Not really." Thanks to his meticulousness, he's barely made a dent in his meal.

"What do you say we grab a drink after this, huh? There's a great pub not too far."

"I've been sober for years."

"Oh." A pause. "I drink a lot." I laugh nervously, suddenly self-conscious. "I mean, not like crazy—just, like,

yeah—I like to drink.”

He places his burger carefully on its wrapper and focuses on me with all the concern of a therapist getting paid \$275 an hour. “You wanna talk about it?”

I tap my fingers and stare into the off-white of the table. He puts a hand over mine. Though his hands are callused and ashen, his fingernails are neatly clipped. “You get me a pair of those 2-for-1 apple pies and I’m all ears.”

\*

My job is thankless, but pays great overtime and requires little more than working hard to pass the time. I work as a toll collector on the George Washington Bridge. We aren’t allowed to read or be on our phones, so I mostly stare for hours on end into oncoming traffic. My lungs are screwed. I’m basically the dirty filter on a cigarette smoked continuously for a decade.

I’ve seen some crazy shit, too—ten car pile-ups, kidnappings, naked drivers, one vehicle packed full of orange balloons—but mostly I watch people hand me bills or scrounge for change, barely making eye contact. I’m like a sandbar people are dying to get past so they can enjoy the open ocean ahead. That is, if you’re not too jaded to think of New York City as open ocean.

I’m one of those people who stays in New York because I’m not sure I’d make sense anywhere else. Here, there’s enough to keep me occupied for the rest of my life, my apartment’s rent-stabilized, and my roommates are quiet. Did I think as a kid that I’d grow up to live in a four-bedroom apartment with no significant other and the most boring job on the face of the planet? Probably not. But here I am.

\*

“Best damn thing on the menu.” Each bite of the dessert brings audible enjoyment—he’s near composing a

song about it. Then, he reaches across the table and hands me his second rectangular pie.

“Why don’t you have this one?” His offering stands suspended in time, haloed by the florescent light overhead.

“Sure.” He waits for me to dig in. I remove the thing from its paper box, examine its crumbly topcoat for a few moments, and finally do.

“Mm Mm Mm. Isn’t it great?”

“Yeah—You know, it’s actually not bad.”

“Nah. I mean, sure, the pie’s delicious, but I’m talking about eating!”

“Eating?”

“Yeah. I was hungry and now I’m full. Magic. Let me tell you, I may not do a lot right, but I’ve always been a good eater.” He smiles to himself, rises, stuffs the wake of his once neatly laid out meal into its brown paper bag, and moves toward the trashcan. “Thanks for the food.” He places a hand on my shoulder before reaching for his walker and turning to go.

“You think we could do this again?”

I swear he winks. “I’m always up for a pie.”

I remain in the booth for a long time. Long after the man slowly scoots backwards through the double doors with his walker. Long after the dinner crowd empties. Long after I ever expected to sit among the heavy scent of deep-fried food.

I needed him, this stranger. I needed that pie. *What the fuck is wrong with me?* I’m such a failure, I can’t even be a proper philanthropist.

All at once, I quickly slide out of the booth and rush toward the register. I look around for whomever I can buy a sandwich for—someone, anyone. But there’s no one. Not at the doors, not near the soda fountains. Everyone inside sits at tables and eats their food with their companions, their families, or stands in line, perfectly content. One of the cashiers gestures for me to order, but I shake my head and

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*“Bottles and other assorted trash lie scattered  
among small leftover piles of dirty snow.  
And yet, the bridge is majestic at night.”*

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shuffle away from the counter, stepping into the windy night.

I instinctively walk uptown, pushing myself into the cold gusts and the vibrating sounds of bachata music from scattered apartments and cars. As I weave toward Haven Avenue, I catch sight of bundled teenagers making out along the edge of the highway. Bottles and other assorted trash lie scattered among small leftover piles of dirty snow. And yet, the bridge is majestic at night. Lit up at all points it looks unbreakable, far from the crumbling truth of its tired frame. The wind screams across the Hudson and burns my ears as I stare ahead at the stream of cars across the bridge. This line of cars, this back and forth, coming and going—this is my entire life.

Ten years ago. Nearly to the day. This is where he jumped. On a clear morning, with a piercing blue sky, a single lane of traffic into one of America's most polluted rivers. And suddenly, I was an only child. Or, maybe that's impossible in adulthood. What's the loss of a sibling when the family is already broken?

\*

Finding (and maintaining) employment was never easy for me. Before working the GW, I hauled furniture—mostly because it paid. Unfortunately, my boss was a hairy, conniving son of a bitch who ate all of his employees' tips. Needless to say, I got laid off, my unemployment ran thin, and I started to get desperate. The posting went up for the toll collector job less than a month after my brother's jump. When I applied, I received a call immediately. Even though I mostly don't believe in all that bullshit, it had to be a sign.

"You sure you wanna do this?" My then girlfriend asked before I went in for my first day. I remember how careful she was around me then, her tone like the narrator in a commercial selling anti-depressants.

"I'm sure." I threw my coat on, kissed her on the forehead, and left. I've been going back on the daily ever since.

I'm ravenous for answers—even now, so many years later. *Why did he do it?* The handsome one, the smart one, the one with so much potential. I'll never know. Not in any real way. I'll never know much about him at all, really, except we shared some DNA, including the same big, brown eyes, and what's done is done, and there's no way to help. The best I can do is clock in day-in and day-out at the booth, the site of his memorial, and eat a 2-for-1 apple pie with a stranger at the McDonald's on 170th. It'll have to be enough.

"DON'T JUMP, MAN! IT'S NOT WORTH IT." I turn to face the voice and see a butch Latina approach from up the block. Her frame is solid; she wears an old school Patrick Ewing jersey and her dark jeans are loose, but add to her swagger. She loses her sideways baseball cap as she hustles my way, dragging a half-empty bottle at her side.

When she reaches me, she throws a hand to my chest and over-articulates in pure whiskey. "Pero, somebody out there loves you."

"Don't worry. Already had one in the family, don't want to make it some kind of record."

"Oh, good. 'Cause life is good, you know? I mean sometimes people break your heart, but life is good." She breaks into sobs. "She's not the only person in the world. You'll love again!" She sits at the edge of the curb, takes a long swig, and breathes deep into the cold.

"Sounds like you're having a tough night."

"You have no idea."

"I might."

"I seen you out here before. Alone. Always thought you might be a jumper."

"Nah. Not me. Too much I wanna see."

"Hungry, huh? Me, too. I always want too much."

She presses her fingertips into her eyes and lets out a loud sigh. "Why's this living thing gotta be so hard, huh?"

"Beats me." I take a seat beside her and she hands me the bottle without asking. I take a drink and feel the whiskey roar through my insides. I might breathe fire in an instant, but I cough instead. "God, that's shitty."

"I figured it was gonna be a long night."

Then we laugh for a long time and talk about our nights, ignoring the wind that sweeps in hard angles across our faces as we pass the bottle back and forth. And for a minute there, life makes sense.

"I think it's finally time for me to get out of the neighborhood."

"Oh yeah?" She asks.

"Yeah."



Christina Quintana (CQ) is a writer with Cuban and Louisiana roots. CQ is the author of the full-length play *Scissoring* (Dramatists Play Service, 2019) and the recipient of fellowships from MacDowell, Queer/Art, Van Lier New Voices at the Lark, and Lambda Literary, among others. She also served as staff writer for the ABC television series *The Baker and the Beauty*.

## PURINO AND THE PABLO ESCOBAR WANNABE

by EDGAR SMITH

Purino rarely went out so early. He just couldn't sleep anymore. Although he'd set the alarm for 7:00 am, his eyes sprung open two hours earlier. He hadn't even been dreaming. Yet in the backyard of his head his thoughts were in turmoil.

With no haste he went through the routine of brushing teeth, showering, scrubbing, shitting and making coffee. All the while, his son was in the back of his mind. A college decision had to be made. It was hard for Purino to tell Ely he couldn't afford the private college he wanted to attend. Not even with the scholarship they were offering. He knew he had to tell him but kept delaying that moment. Probably with the hopeless hope that somehow, someday, something would happen that could change their fate.

The next thought was just as gloomy: Linda, his wife, their troubles were escalating. After almost fifteen years of marriage and two kids, their relationship had taken a turn for the worse.

He took the last sip, the sweetest one, and got out. He opened the taxi app and drove for an hour and a half. It was slow. Just a handful of passengers. At 7:54, he stopped at a light by a deli in New Rochelle. Everything seemed to align for him to have that second cup of coffee: the light wouldn't change, there was an empty parking spot, and the deli was big and inviting.

As soon as he got in, he saw the coffee machine. Three men were behind the counter: one by the register and two where the sandwiches and salads were made. Before the thought had formed in its entirety, he addressed one of the men, a Mexican, and ordered a sausage-egg-and-cheese sandwich, on a roll, with tomatoes. The Mexican relayed the order to the other guy, a Colombian, who got to it right away.

Before Purino had finished sweetening his coffee, he realized he hadn't specified he wanted ketchup and mayo on his sandwich. He took one step toward them but heard the Mexican say, *está listo, primo*. He couldn't believe it. He felt this sandwich had been made way too fast.

He went to the third man, the cashier, paid, grabbed the bagged sandwich and took a few steps toward the door; yet from the threshold, he seemed to think it over, and whirled around back to the guys.

*Primo, disculpe, ¿le pusieron mayonesa y ketchup?* He asked the Mexican, who shook his head and told him he'd been given a chance to say what he wanted in the sandwich. *I know, primo*, he said, but usually, you know, you guys ask if we want ketchup and those things. The Mexican shrugged, not in a bad way, but a shrug is a

shrug. Purino extended the arm with the sandwich and asked if he could add the ingredients. The Mexican sighed and said he'd do it, but the next time he should mention everything he wants in it. Purino nodded.

That should have been the end of it. However, moved by the stubborn need of having to have the last word in everything, he added, thank you, primo, nothing personal, you know, it's just that you normally have to ask the customer...

He recognized the accent even before his mind processed what the guy had said: it was the Colombian. In Spanish he said, we don't 'have' to do anything. The only thing that's certain is death.

Purino tried to look at the Colombian's face but the built-in storage where they put the bread prevented it. *I don't think I was talking to you*, Purino said. But that, he knew right away, wasn't what he wanted to say. He knew he had to say more, something more specific, harsher... this idiot had just mentioned death, and it sounded like a threat. Who talks about death in an argument over adding ketchup to a damn sandwich?

The Mexican handed the bag back to him and said, *listo, primo, have a good one*, but Purino knew the Mexican could see it on his face: the anger, because the Mexican added, no problem here. *Thank you, primo*, Purino said, but I don't see how people get confused so easily. This one here has watched too many Telemundo soap operas about Colombians being killers and what not. Be careful, you don't know who's who out here.

Yeah, you don't know who the fuck is who, the Colombian lashed back, for the first time showing his baby face from behind the counter. He couldn't have been a day older than twenty-two. The stare down lasted but a second, yet they knew the grudge would last much longer. As the next words crawled out of Purino's mouth, with a will of their own (it appeared to him), a muffled voice in the back of his head preached: *don't say this, walk away, this is nothing, it's not worth it... Who the fuck you think you are? You're here making salad, pendejo, you're no Pablo Escobar!*

Now regret, you see, it feels like a sort of sudden shiver inside, like a bad ruffling of one's spirit. As soon as the words came out, Purino knew there was no turning back: he would have to either fight this man or publicly humiliate himself by refusing the confrontation.

The Colombian was two inches taller than him. Although their build was similar, the difference in age was

too significant to ignore: Purino was at least twenty-five years older than his newfound enemy.

The Mexican rushed to step between the two heated men. The cashier yelled something in Arabic and then tried to repeat it in English but couldn't. He finally managed to shout Stop four times, as if to reaffirm that he was saying the right thing.

Purino and the Colombian were at that stage previous to a fist fight when both antagonists release their most intimately childish hero-versus-villain, hand-gesturing, laughably-fantastic threats. But they say them in a way and tone that leaves no room for doubt that, given the chance, they will attempt to bring them to fruition.

Now this event, for the second time, could have found its conclusion at this point, for as Purino retaliated with an array of ingenious curse words (Shut the fuck up, you four-cock-at-the-same-time-sucking-Pablo-Escobar-wannabe), he slowly backed down toward the exit door. Slowly, almost as if an afterthought. (Anyone looking would have thought he was doing this slow-walk unconsciously.)

It could have ended there but didn't. Because the Colombian took off his dirty apron, slammed it on the counter and yelled, you a fucking pussy. Let's go outside, old man. Let's go, motherfucker!

Now, you see, Purino could no longer think straight. He just couldn't. Purino was Dominican. A Dominican man simply cannot think straight after the word motherfucker or *tu maldita mai*. It's just impossible. So straight out the door, bag in hand and fist in the air, Purino made the conscious but absurd decision of fighting a man half his age. He was right about one thing: neither of them knew his enemy. Purino didn't know if this man was an expert fighter, if he knew martial arts or had taken boxing lessons. He didn't know if this man was an ex-convict who'd murdered other men with his bare hands. He was wondering these things and others as he stepped outside; and, in the end, it was probably all this rushed stream of unwelcome thoughts (of unadmitted fear) what pushed poor old Purino to try the surprise punch.

He whirled around like a mighty twister and threw the only punch he'd thrown in the last thirty-nine years. As he spun around to hit him, he lost his balance and reached his foe with his fist right on the left temple. Purino saw the young man's eyes roll fast and sort of hide into his sockets, as if trying to flee all the way up and into his forehead.

Maybe this was the last conscious thought Purino had—the cognition that he'd probably killed this kid—before his feet trampled and his legs gave out. He fell on the pavement as if in slow motion and only when his eyes managed to get a fix gaze on the sharp yellow of the sun, did he realize that he, too, was dying.

The Mexican kept saying, oh no, oh no, *hijole*, *estos dos pendejos*, as he debated whom he'd try to help first. But

the truth is, it was almost certain to him, that there was nothing he could really do for either one of them other than call 911 and hope their families could find the strength to face their deaths.

When the paramedics arrived, they took some time examining the corpses. The Mexican had to recount the events a few times for the police, the medics, the media and the firefighters.

The hardest part was explaining the knife.

He couldn't find the words to say that the whole thing, their deaths, had been but a stupid accident.

When Purino spun around to punch the Colombian, he hadn't meant to kill him—who in their right mind thinks he can kill a man with a punch?—but he lost control of his movements and his fist landed in the wrong place. Purino had no way to know that the Colombian had taken the knife from the counter when he gave him his back to exit the Deli. But it was obvious in the kid's facial expression that he didn't mean to use it.

But when Purino turned and caught him by surprise, his impulse was such that he didn't see the sharp weapon outstretched before him—which, indeed, the Colombian had been holding in that threatening and clumsy way you hold a knife when all you want to do is scare the shit out of someone—and just plunged onto it (or *it into him*); and the lethal thing went in and pierced his heart.

I saw it in his face, the Mexican said, that he was trying to scare the man away because he didn't want to fight, either. Because in spite of all of his young bravado, he was just as scared as the old man.

Shit just happened.



Edgar Smith is a Dominican writer, publisher and translator who resides in New York. He has published over a dozen books (poetry, novels and short stories) in both English and Spanish. His most popular works are *arrimao* (novel, 2017), *El Palabrador* (short stories, 2013), *Gnuj & Alt* (novel, 2016), *La inmortalidad del cangrejo* (novel, 2015), and *Voz propia / Voice of our own* (poetry, 2019). He is the founder of Books&Smith.

## NOT MY FAULT

by YESENIA FLORES DÍAZ

As students rushed past me towards the gym, I continued to push my way through the crowded hallway in the opposite direction. It was so loud I couldn't hear myself think. For once, I welcomed the noise. I wished to stay afloat with the laughter around me because the thought of all the questions to come my way after the evening news report would no doubt sink me.

"Yo, watch where you're going," somebody yelled at me. I didn't bother to turn and see whose shoulders I bumped.

"My bad," I hollered back.

"Hey, you're going the wrong way! Meralis, is that you?"

Someone behind me yanked the loop on my backpack as if I owed them money. I pulled my hoodie down, swerved real hard, and put my hands up like I was ready to fight.

"Chill, what's wrong with you girl?" More a command than a question, it was hard to avoid my best friend's eyes as she grilled me, "I've been texting you like crazy. How come you don't answer?"

"I can't right now," I waved her away.

"Don't come at me with 'I can't,'" Tasha dragged me a few feet toward an empty classroom. "The PEP Rally's supposed to start in five minutes. Where you going?"

"Save me a seat. I gotta make a quick stop."

"Why you acting so weird?" She pinched my sleeve and came closer, "You can't even look me in the face!"

"I promise I'll tell you when I get back. Just hold me a spot. I'll be right there," and I broke free. At the far end of the corridor, the marching band lined up in their brand new navy blue tracksuits and orange headbands. I

wondered what sets they'd play and where their traditional jackets and shakos were that made them look like toy soldiers. The members were joined by the color guard who held flags like prizes. The dancers strutted to the opposite row of metal lockers to stretch and warm up. *They think they're so cute in their tights*, I thought. From afar, I heard Tony, always the leader, call his crew for attention and bring them in for a huddle. I ducked into the stairwell and flew down the steps, careful to take two at a time.

I exited at the bottom of the landing and made a sharp left toward the counseling suite. "Young lady, do you have an appointment?" the secretary called after me as I blasted through the reception area like a violent gust of rain. "Ms. Hernández is expecting me, thanks!" I hollered over my shoulder. She muttered something about kids today loud enough for me to hear. *Man, whatever for her.*

I rapped on the office door with my knuckles. Her blinds were closed. The lights were dim. It didn't appear that she was there until the door opened and I was waved in with an index finger. Ms. Hernández covered the mouthpiece and whispered, "Gimme a minute, almost done." I set my backpack on the floor, plopped down on the comfy sofa chair, and crossed my arms around a small, throw pillow with the word *Believe* on it. I didn't realize how tight I gripped it until she asked, "So what's going on?" Funny I hadn't even noticed she was done with the call. I sat back, let the pillow fall to my side, and covered my face with my hands as if it were possible to dry the tears that dripped from my eyes like water from a broken faucet.

She reached for a box of tissues on her bookcase and offered it without a word. The silence and gentle mist of soft lavender from the diffuser across the room calmed

me. I turned to avoid her look of concern and met her daughter's smile behind a glass frame on the end table.

"I'm fine," I stammered, "No. I'm not fine...it's that...I just don't know what to do. I'm sorry."

"You don't have anything to apologize for. We'll sit here as long as necessary."

I laughed and brought tissue to the side of my face as if it were a shield, "I don't know where my mom is. She's missing."

"Missing? What do you mean?"

I took a deep breath and let out all the weird things I've noticed about my mother that I kept under wraps from everybody. How Mami's words made less sense each day. How she seemed to forget things like picking up Seba from preschool. How she'd locked herself in the bathroom. How she'd take us for long walks on the hottest and humid days so we can sweat out the bad energy around us. By the time we'd get back home, we were all parched and sunburned. How she'd carry her purse at all times and never set it down because she didn't want anyone to take it. How she wore dark sunglasses indoors to protect her eyes from the light bulbs. How she never answered the phone because according to her, there were people on the line who shouldn't be there. Eavesdroppers, she called them. Instead, she listened to the voicemails over and over again to make sure callers were who they said they were.

"I see," she paused. "Sounds like you've had a lot to deal with since the last time we saw each other. How long did you say your mom's been gone?"

"I didn't. It's only been one night though so far. But the thing is, it's not like this is the first time either."

The static crackle of Ms. Hernández' two-way radio interrupted us, "Admin needs Ms. Hernández in the gymnasium."

"This is Hernández, copy. I'm with a student. Over."

"Roger that."

Ms. Hernández looked at me, "Now I'm the one who's sorry, Meralis. Go ahead."

"The PEP Rally, right? Everyone's supposed to be there."

"It's okay. There's so much noise in the gym right now that no one will miss us. Let's continue the conversation. What do you mean this is not the first time?"

"It's happened before. A few weeks back, she went out by herself and didn't return. My dad called the police and they found her by the waterfront. When my father went down to the station to pick her up, she put on a show. He mentioned our names to try and get her to leave with him, which she eventually did, but before that happened, she insisted we were better off with him and said, 'They don't need me.'"

Ms. Hernández sat up taller in her seat. "How do you know this?" she asked.

"Well, my Titi Agnes called very early the next morning. My dad was alone in the kitchen making coffee and getting our lunches ready. He was on speaker. I

overheard them," I crossed my ankles and folded my fingers over my thumb as if to trap it, "He didn't know I was up."

Ms. Hernández looked down at my lap before our eyes met: "So neither your father nor your Titi Agnes know what you know about your mom."

I reached for the *Believe* pillow and held on to it real tight before I unraveled further, "I shouldn't have come, I'm sorry to dump this on you. I should go—"

"Dump *this* on *me*?" Ms. Hernández sounded unconvinced but she pressed on with her voice lower than before, "That's why I am here. To listen. To understand. To help. I'm glad you reached out."

Like the embroidery on the pillow, I wanted to believe Ms. Hernández was right. I wanted to believe that we'd find Mami. I wanted to believe that Mami would get better. I wanted to believe that Papi would keep it real with me. But smack in the middle of the word *Believe* is the word *lie*. *When someone doesn't tell the whole truth, how is that different from a lie? Or is it one and the same?*

"Look at me, Meralis. You have a lot going on. Let's acknowledge that first," Ms. Hernández paused in mid sentence as if to extend a lifejacket before she smiled with reassurance, "Second, none of this is your fault. None of it. Repeat after me, 'None of this is my fault.'"

I mumbled the words as if they were marbles that crashed behind my teeth and shattered to a halt. My tongue traced the invisible shards along the roof of my mouth. I willed myself not to swallow the bitterness I tasted.

"Say it again," Ms. Hernández continued, "This time, raise your chin a little bit and take a deep breath. Come on, I'll say it with you: 'None of this is my fault.'"



Yesenia Flores Díaz credits her parents and elementary school librarian for her love of books. In 2020, she was a Latinx in Publishing's Writers Mentorship Program Mentee and recognized as a Teacher and Librarian Scholar by the Key West Literary Seminar. Her short story, *March To My Own Beat*, appeared in *Boricua en la Luna: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Voices*. Yesenia won the 2016 Brooklyn Non-Fiction Prize and the 2017 Montgomery Writes! Fiction Contest.

## EMERGENCY EXIT

by OSWALDO ESTRADA

Translated by Mireya Jamal

It was him. Older. With a receding hairline like his father's. The strands dyed an artificial black. The permanent bags under the eyes. Perhaps deeper or more swollen. And the threatening mustache. Also dyed and perfectly groomed. Like him.

How did I not notice during the three-hour flight from Mexico City? And what was he doing there, sitting on the other side of the aisle two rows in front of me?

Was it him? I tried to hide in my seat. To become invisible so he wouldn't discover me. I instinctively put my head down. And I felt my heart beating with urgency, the need to fade away right then and there, the terror of seeing him before me and not knowing how to hide.

In the few minutes that passed while the front rows emptied until reaching ours, I rehearsed several possibilities of avoiding or confronting him. Uttering again useless prayers. Drying my sweaty palms. Slowing my breath.

The first time I tried to escape I got all the way to the building's front door. But the neighbor on the first floor had washed the entrance and I slipped on the wet tiles. Sore, I wandered through the streets not knowing where to go. In my desperation it didn't occur to me to grab my passport, my wallet. He didn't even follow me. He knew I wouldn't get far with my belly. If I didn't escape when I was two or three months along, how would I do it now that I was about to give birth?

When I told my mother-in-law that her son hit me, she was horrified. He's like his father, she responded, shocked. Covering her mouth with one hand. Try not to contradict him. Do what he says, Rosita. With men it's better just to go along. And don't even think of threatening him because it will be worse for you.

—I dare you lay a hand on me again and I'll kill you, I exploded one day armed with the kitchen shears. It took longer for me to speak than it did for me to fall to the ground. On my knees. Begging for forgiveness. Paying double. First for serving him cold food and then for trying to defend myself when my lentils slammed against the wall.

He got up, smiling, satisfied to leave me on the ground, as usual. Happy to have taught me a lesson. It was him. Courteous with his neighboring passenger. Polite and quite nice. The same one who would return and ask me for forgiveness with a loving gesture. Telling me some joke. Singing me a song. His enormous arms lifted above him and without difficulty pulled out the carry-on. A leather

jacket and a plastic bag.

Had he seen me as I passed his seat? Or in the waiting room? My previous flight had arrived three hours earlier. I had a coffee and was one of the first people to present my documents at the service counter. I suppose that's why they offered me a more comfortable seat in the emergency exit row which did nothing for me during those moments. I sure would've liked to pull the red lever, open the narrow door, and throw myself into the abyss. Forever. But I've never had the courage to kill myself.

I allowed several passengers to go ahead of me. And then, when I felt six, seven, eight had passed, I began to follow him. Clutching my purse. Anchoring in my shoes.

There are things a woman never forgets. The back of a man. The way he walks. Twisting the right foot inward. Adjusting his shoulders every eight or nine seconds. Straightening his neck. Fixing his hair.

That's why I liked him. Because he was tall. Elegant and distinguished. Very masculine and highly sought-after by the girls in the neighborhood. His bad-boy and seductive appearance. I remember one day we were walking together downtown and a guy stole my purse. He was fourteen or fifteen years old. I don't know. He followed him for a few streets. Like the thief, crossed a highly trafficked avenue, avoiding cars speeding by. Without thinking of his own death. And he caught him. He hit him on the ground, beating him to a pulp. He made him apologize to me. For you, Rosita, I'm willing to kill, he told me at the bus stop covering me with kisses. And I admired those bruised hands that showed me their love with blows.

I had to walk quickly to catch up to him. My heart beating out of my chest. My legs flying through the air. When I was a few feet away from him, I felt the old panic resurface. My heart in my throat. Again, the faltering breath. The terror that he would grab me by the hair and tell me that it was my fault he died.

I stood there, with my arms dangling, unable to say a word to him. Like the day he threw me out on the street and didn't know what to do with my life. Where could I go looking like that? The woman who raised me told me from the start. If you leave with that lowlife forget about me. That man is worthless, and everybody knows it. He loves you now, but he will be the end of you.

—Just kill me, I begged him when my son died. But he let me live. Licking my wounds, writhing like a worm.

I think he died to stop suffering. I had received

blows throughout the entire pregnancy. For fading one of his shirts. For putting salt in the coffee. For not opening my legs to him. When he was born, he was a little rat and they had to help him breathe. I don't know how many days he was in the NICU, and I couldn't visit him. How could I go if I had to attend to Evelio, if I wasn't even capable of making a healthy son?

—Don't worry, ma'am, the immigration agent gently approached me. Let me help you find your documents. I knew where they were, but I let him take my purse and look for my passport. Opening one zipper. Then another. Allowing him to move away from me. Triumphant. Like the last time I saw him.

He was about five months. I hurriedly bathed him to have time to prepare dinner. He fell asleep while I was breast feeding him, and I nestled him in the middle of the bed. I made the sign of the cross over him, and I left to finish the *chiles rellenos* filled with slices of cheese and onions. I left the rice until last, when I was already placing the chiles in the *salsa roja* to boil.

When he came through the door, he was pleased to see that I had everything ready. That even if I was useless, at least I had learned to prepare his mother's dishes. I served him immediately so I could go to my son, but he made me sit next to him. Between bites he told me that his younger sister was ill. Gravely ill. The following day he would cross to the other side to see her. And he didn't know when he would be able to return.

—What about us?

—What about you? Don't you see my sister is dying?

I didn't say anything else and went to look after my son without asking if he would leave money for expenses, if he had paid the rent, or what I should do in case of an emergency.

I found him face down, sleeping like an angel. He had turned while I was cooking and died of asphyxiation. He was still warm when I carried him in my arms but motionless. The way he came into the world.

I didn't cry. I lulled him and sang in his ear. Filling myself with his smell. Playing with his tiny curls. I didn't cry when he shouted, striking me, calling me a murderer. Kill me, I begged him, waiting for him to crack my head open with his boots. So I could join him.

I didn't put up a fight when he dragged me and kicked me out the door. I let him leave with my son in his arms, wrapped in his yellow blanket. Without demanding anything. Only God knows if he took him to the hospital or the morgue. If he crossed the border. Or just abandoned him in the trash.

I drifted for days not knowing where to go, searching for death with each step. There is always someone compassionate who offers some bread, a taco, or cardboard to sleep on. If it hadn't been for Señora Martina who recognized me in the park, I don't know what could've happened to me. Rosita, how have you come to this, she

cried when she saw me, absent-minded. And she took me to her house. To work.

It was him. The man who still makes me fear for my life. Him. After forty-two years of chasing me even in dreams, with his blows and shouts, calling me a murderer. Him. Still splendid and handsome. Most likely the father of other children. And me, an old defenseless cockroach that still hides at the sight of the enemy.

Was it him? Staying close to the wall, I grabbed my suitcase, without lifting my gaze too much, trying to make myself smaller than I already am. From the corner of my eye I scanned the area to avoid him, and I placed myself behind a column. With my yellow ribboned suitcase I went around and behind the carousels that had the packages of other flights, I hurried my pace and gave my paperwork to customs.

—Anything to declare? Asked the young agent who could've been my son. Thin. Dark. With sad eyes.

I had so much to tell him and words escaped me, the grievances, the defeated pleading. Even more so when I felt him pass me, and I hung my head again to avoid him. Was it him? I smelled his cologne aged in wood barrels. And I felt the fear of my twenty-year-old self, the trembling jaw, the saliva pooled at my gums.

I ran with my eyes fixed on the ground, searching for an emergency exit. With the terror that he might crush me. I asked the taxi driver to take me to the cemetery, where I grieve my dead son whenever I can. Even if he's not there. To ask forgiveness for leaving him all alone the day he asphyxiated. So he can take me, and we can be two souls without a grave. Rosita and José Manuel. Two orphaned kites swiftly fleeing this cruel world.



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## REMEMBRANCES

by JUAN ANTONIO GONZÁLEZ

Translated by Javier Villarreal, PhD

*Dedicated to Rolando R. Hinojosa-Smith*

Sitting down to prepare the lecture at his desk, his thoughts couldn't help but wander upon recalling the old three-room dwelling with the outhouse. It could have been due to the tune playing on the radio:

*Tiende tu vuee elo, triste gavioo ota  
Que así mis penas, volando van...*

He remembered the lights in the middle of the rooms dangling from twisted wires whose base had to be held with the left hand while the right twisted the switch. The icy winters that chilled to the bone also crossed his mind. Could it have been colder back then, or were our clothes utterly inadequate, or both? The streets were nothing but dirt. And when it rained, especially in winter, one had to wear rubber boots because of the mud.

Ah, but of course, the radio would dialogue with us about different topics of interest: news, events, etc. Well, engaging in a dialogue that's just a saying; instead, it was a monologue, and, in turn, we created a personal conversation to accompany the witty remarks of the commentator.

Grandmother was already an elderly woman when they lived at the farm and would always remind him of stories about old times: tube radios or Victrolas with individual batteries to play records at the farm. In talking about it, the names of musicians Pedro Ayala, Narciso Martínez y Domingo Peña were constant in the conversation in that era, mainly because their music was commonly played on the radio to lighten chores at home. It must've been the 30s or 40s and the country was still not at rest. Lingering disagreements remained due to the distribution of land and crime proliferated as a result. Hanging bodies left on the trail by the Rural Police served as reminders that cattle rustling was considered a grave offense.

Times, however, had changed little by little. The exploitation of white gold continued as a way of life into the 50s and 60s, even after they left the farm. Cotton production peaked in the region. It became an epicenter of development, with all the consequences implied in an economic expansion. It not only became a new source for jobs and immigration from deep in the country, but also a boost for the cultural landscape with regional fairs, dances

with big bands, etc. We really lived those times!

Troubled and losing his sense of urgency, he imagined himself sitting in the living room. Suddenly, the music to *Serenata a Los Ejidos* with don Nico, a radio series, sounded. Its daily musical signature was a polka, leading with a requinto instead of an accordion. The daily news broadcasted to the entire region now. As he listened to the musical programming, the sound of a couplet clouded his eyes.

*Cuando estés lejos, en otros mares,  
Y estos cantares, no escuches yaa...*

He felt that the time to return was now. The present demanded it. Nevertheless, given the demands of the present, he mentally justified never having gone because he regularly revisited his childhood places. Physically, he had immersed himself in his job so deep that he had lost track of time so much so that even the idea of returning had disappeared. That's why he would often remember "... *al volver la vista atrás se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar...*"

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*"...their way had been  
paid for...by many  
generations before them."*

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It had been a long journey for Melitón Rosales. He had looked back at his life many times, affirming don Antonio's prophetic words. For him, though, "*volver la vista atrás*" meant reasserting his origin and walking with his feet firmly on the ground, just like his parents and those before them did. Many generations had given their lives for their land and labor. Each footstep was rooted deep in sweat. As one of them, it was his turn to plow the land now just a little further ahead. And by planting his feet firmly,

he assured the generations educated under his tenure a fertile ground on which to root and bloom, before finding their way into the world. This was the result of university classroom experience: one could make a difference in a large number of students with such a *credo*. And he had been doing so for many years. He was confident to have done his part, and the coming generations could confirm it. They would not put up with discrimination. They were marching steadily forward, aware of their earned rights and with the knowledge that their way had been paid for – and, oh man, in what way!—by many generations before them.

*Vuelve gavioo otaa,  
Vuelve a tu n ii idoo...*

Walking back the journey of his life and highlighting it with music milestones, the names of *Los Alegres de Terán* surfaced from his childhood, alongside memories of his parents. From the same era, he remembered *Los Hermanos Banda* and *Los Donneños*, although not the complete names of their songs. From his teenage years and his relationship with the opposite sex appeared the name of *Los Relámpagos del Norte* with the overlapping voices of Cornelio and Ramón, and the individually tailored touches of the accordion in “Mi Tesoro,” and “¿Dónde están aquellos ojos?” and other tunes. Then he would recall “El chubasco” by *Carlos and José*, and “El soldado raso” by *Freddie Gómez*, from the Vietnam era.

And thus, he reached the age of annual high school dances when one would buy orchid corsages for the girlfriend, dance to the rhythm of local bands, such as *Noé Pro*, musical groups with marimbas, and others.

Of course, there was an affinity for the great musical movement he breathed through KRIO. This regional English-language radio station played the latest Rock and Roll music. He remembers *twisteando* and *estroleando* and even boogying to the rhythm of the music of Santana, among others.

His country roots, however, never allowed him to shut the door to the music of Carlos Guzmán, Freddie Martínez, Sonny Osuna, Gilberto Pérez, nor to any of the “Onda Chicana” that embraced him in his early years. It was common back then to shuffle from one radio station to another, catching the best music offered in the Valley, his home.

Reminiscing had given him the idea of writing about the history of music in the Rio Grande Valley. He would discuss regional musicians such as *Los Duendes del Control*, the *Zúñiga and Lara Brothers*, *Rigoberto Rosales*, *Ramón Ayala* and *Los Bravos del Norte*, *Los Cadetes de Linares*, and *Luis and Julián*, concluding with *Intocable*.

He would find a way to weave into his presentation related topics, such as *corridos*. In this genre, he would

highlight those folk songs dealing with contraband and treason or the ones about confrontations when crossing the river. He was drawn to the latter for some romantic reason: dramatic displays of the weakest individual standing up against the strongest for what he believed—a belief that was oftentimes personal and individualized conviction. Men lived or died upholding their truth. They didn’t back down in the face of adversity, but rather put their lives on the line and defended it at all costs. Thus, many of the heroes of the *corridos* faced overwhelming odds, where honor and justice should prevail above reason or imposition. He would cite *Jacinto Treviño*, *Gregorio Cortez*, and *Santos Cantú*, including the corrido *Las tres tumbas*, and ending with a walk by the river recalling “Los pistoleros famosos.”

Well, with a clear topic now, he would provide an ethnomusical perspective to his presentation. In doing so, he would bring about sixty years of history and something more than utter appreciation of what is ours. A sigh slipped from his breath when he heard on the radio:

*Vuelve a tu n ii i do...  
Regresa yaa...*

And performed by *Los Alegres de Terán*.



Juan Antonio González, Professor of Hispanic Letters at Texas Southmost College in Brownsville, Texas, writes narrative, poetry, and literary criticism. His creative works have been anthologized in over one hundred arbitrated national and international journals. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the North American Academy of the Spanish Language Journal (RANLE), and Editor in Chief of the Novosananderino Arbitrated Literary Journal, and the student Literary Journal *De Puño y Letra*. He also holds Editorial Appointments for the journals *Puentes*, *ASU*, and *Pegaso*, *OU*. Since 2005, he is Codirector of the Binational Conference *Letras en el Estuario* at *UTB-TSC* and *TSC*.

# NONFICTION



## EL DIARIO DE UNA CHICANA AT HARVARD

by GABRIELA PEREZ

March 23, 2017 - There are so many things that I want to think about and learn more about. There are so many projects and ideas I still want to explore. I am not sure how everything will happen, but I do know this future seems promising. I am not afraid of where I end up. My biggest fear is never going after the goals my heart needs to be happy. I am not interested in the material possessions of this world; I am more excited about the knowledge I chase after. I never thought I'd be here; I never thought I would be at Harvard. There are so many moments I thought about quitting and people laughed and people questioned, and people dismissed me. But I never dismissed myself. I believed in myself because I knew no one else was going to do it for me. This education, this current destination, is a tribute to my 16-year-old self that felt so out of place, so sad and so lonely. To my 16-year-old self: do not dwell on the reasons you are weird or don't fit in. Instead, give it to God to carry. Only God knows why these feelings and circumstances are happening to you. Let go of looking for answers, let go of the folks who walked away or didn't even care to be around you in the first place. Instead, thank them because they allowed you to see yourself by the actions you took. Now, you're at Harvard getting ready to do more amazing things.

March 24, 2017 - I sit in silence while fingers pound on Mac keyboards. My fingers pound on a Chromebook. I turn my head to the right, it's dark outside. Today is an overcast day, today the rain is merciful and the wind less aggressive. Massive windows blend into the dome-shaped ceiling and

are sustained by columns on both ends of the reading room. Some lights are off, some peers are reading. My week is done. Widener Library is my new sanctuary. Marble stairs are my new normal. Wooden mahogany tables and chairs are home now. Subtle noises are the only conversations I hear. One more week at Harvard. One entire spring break by myself. It surely does get easier. I surely do belong. Impostor syndrome, gone.

April 18, 2017 - I'm sorry I haven't written in you in a while. There have been many things happening all at once. During winter break I was asked by the principal of my high school alma mater if there was a possibility, I'd be able to speak to the students. I said I'd love to. Whether they'll call me or not, just having the platform to start sharing this story is amazing. I felt so excited to share it with the high school classes I spoke to. So, that's still lingering on in my soul somehow. For some reason, starting on this memoir and being able to think about memory in a different way has allowed me to gather enough courage to be able to share this story. It's a story that's been in the making for 26 years and I finally get to share a piece of it. If anything, I've learned along the way, that knowledge is how society survives. Tlazocamati, Lila Downs. The very act of sharing knowledge is what helps us sustain our comunidades. Seeking knowledge, reading/writing has been thought of—by some governments—as too dangerous. So, the very act of obtaining it is dangerous; dangerous enough that some students have died in Mexico. Tlatelolco. Ayotzinapa. It's crazy to think that I could have easily been one of the students killed that day just for asking

questions, but I wasn't. I'm here, on this side of the border. El Norte. In some sense, the safer side of the border but not really. Children here are killed by dirty water, by the color of their skin, but less often for wanting to learn to read and write. I was born into a time where those who came before me died so that I could have the opportunity to read and write. Knowledge is a powerful thing for those of us who don't have it and dangerous for those who don't want us to obtain it. It establishes a different power dynamic. Knowing that it's possible for someone, someday, to read my story gives me hope. It gives me hope that liberation of the oppressed continues. Liberation continues even after I'm gone. So, while I can't give everyone a car or money, I can pass on the knowledge I've gained along the way to help others avoid the mistakes I've made. That's how we learn. In any case, while I'm not sure what exactly is my destination, I do know that it's time to take the next step. There is so much to do!

That said, I've taken a pause on my dating life but not because I give up on love. On the contrary, I think I believe more in love now than I ever have. I've come to realize that the kind of love I was looking for was the kind of love that completed me. And, while I think love can be complimentary, it shouldn't complete you. I've been learning that I am complete on my own. I am whole on my own. I don't need a man to tell me how much he loves me because I already love myself enough. Then again, it's not even about not needing a man. At this point I've come to realize that I just want to live this life on my own. I'm not looking to join forces with anyone right now. Maybe years down the road, but not right now. There is too much at stake and I want to eliminate the distractions. Dating takes too much time and effort. After 10 years of dating, nothing has worked out. Why the hell should I get married? For love? That's such a stupid reason. I guess for love, but the many experiences that have led me to this framework have all convinced me that I don't want to get married. If I did, I

would have gotten married already. There was only one guy I wanted to marry and look how that turned out. Thank God it didn't work out!

Could we just side-step for a little bit to, yes, the topic of my ex-boyfriend Turibio? Can we talk about how effing rude this guy is?! I guess everyone was right and I was missing the idealized version of Turibio—the guy I wanted him to be and not the guy he was. I fell in love with his potential and the many possibilities that could have happened, but after seeing his text messages, I realized this guy's soul is so effing rotten. He is a jerk, and I'm not sure why I liked him. I guess falling madly in love meant losing all my judgment. How do you not care about another human being even after they're gone? How do you not know that love is more than just mere f-cking? I will never second-guess myself about the choices and decisions I made for you. I walk away from this, at least now, unscathed, knowing I did everything I could. My heart is pure, my conscience is clean. Tú? I'm not sure, but I wish you the best of luck. Leaving me, this relationship because of "distance" shows more about your character than it does about mine.

April 19, 2017 - The one thing I think we never fully did a good job at was talking it through. In my defense I didn't think I was ready; I was hurt and shocked when he asked me if we should go our separate ways. I said no, but he insisted it would be best. Besides, he would say, you deserve better. You deserve to be with a lawyer or a doctor, not me. I couldn't understand the reasons for him suddenly wanting me to walk away from it when he was the first person to say I love you, when he put in effort to arrange dates, and when he talked about our future. I think, in the end, it was on us both. If I could go back, I'm not sure I would change anything. I think I gave the relationship everything I had. I was a mess (it was my last quarter at university) and I wasn't sure how everything would work out. I wasn't sure if I would accept the offer from Harvard because I didn't

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*“...but I loved him. I thought that was enough.  
I thought that loving him despite everything,  
he'd take notice and love me back.”*

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want to lose him. I guess we both felt uncertain about the relationship as well as ourselves. He claims that we were too different, but I beg to differ. I think we were both stubborn and that made it difficult to compromise. I had a lot of fun during those 6 months and I would never have it otherwise.

By his side, I learned many things about myself. The biggest one was learning how to love someone different from myself. We had different tastes in music or movies, but I loved him. I thought that was enough. I thought that loving him despite everything, he'd take notice and love me back. He may have loved me, once, but he let me go. And if anything, I think that was the hardest part to accept: that he let me go. I'll never fully know why he left. I'll never have that narrative to tell myself, to comfort myself. I couldn't understand why, after conversations about marriage and future and making the world a better place and talking about Chicana consciousness, he would leave a girlfriend who was going to Harvard. Harvard! He left me at the most successful moment in my life. Knowing what I had gone through—knowing my struggles—he chose to leave. Maybe he wanted nothing to do with it, maybe he wasn't ready to tell folks his girlfriend was at Harvard because they would look at him differently, as if he couldn't accomplish the same level of success. But if he truly knew me, he would know that being at Harvard would never change me. It hasn't. Sure, I enjoy it, but if he really knew me to the core, he'd know that my biggest success in life is not being awarded with medals or inducted into honor societies. Success is getting to share all that with the people around me because this success isn't just mine. It's everybody's. I'm not sure why he didn't understand that. Lord, can you tell me why?

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*“...it's the kind of routine  
that I've been looking for  
this entire time.”*

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April 20, 2017 - And today, just like any other day, I wake up and fall into routine. It's not the kind of routine that makes me upset; it's the kind of routine that I've been looking for this entire time. It's a routine that, as I stare out the window, reminds me of a routine I used to do. I did it at Riverside, I did it at the community college. Now, I can finally fall into it again. I can finally think about the kinds of things I want

to do and the kinds of things I need to do. Next year will be my last year here and the last opportunity I have at taking advantage of all the little things. I think I've been doing that so far, but I think I need to do more of it. In any case, I'm extremely happy to move forward with all this stuff. I am extremely happy to be able to have the opportunity to begin a new life. After HDS, I want to continue with my studies. A doctorate program is the goal, but I am also aware of the possibility of not being admitted. Still, I want to think about this. I want to disrupt American Catholicism.

\*The name Turibio is a pseudonym



Gabby is a Chicana scholar whose work is at the intersection of religious lives, autobiography, biography, and memoir. Her current work interrogates the negotiated space between Chicano activism and religion among Chicano priests during 1960s America. Her past works include an ethnographic take on the “Surfing Madonna” in the surfer town of Encinitas, CA. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies at the University of California, Riverside and her Master of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School. She currently lives San Diego, CA where she enjoys drinking her morning coffee on the beach.

## LEAVING BOYLE HEIGHTS

by ROBERT G. RETANA

Boyle Heights, where I grew up, lies on the east bank of the Los Angeles River, next to Downtown Los Angeles. The East Los Angeles Interchange is located there, connecting drivers to seven major freeways. Though countless numbers of people drive through Boyle Heights every day, it is mostly known to outsiders for its older buildings defaced by gang graffiti. Unfortunately, the richness of Latino culture is often overshadowed by gang violence; and, the dignity of hard working people who clean houses and bus tables is eclipsed by headlines denouncing illegal immigration. In the mix of it all are just regular folks trying to make a living, raise their kids and live an honest life.

However, not all gang members are as bad as you might think. “Cholos have respect,” my cholo neighbor Manuel—known as “Güero”—once told me as he sipped the last few drops of his forty ounce. He had spent much of his adult life in a penitentiary, yet he could still engage me in polite conversation. Over the years, the tattoos on his arms had become a sleeve covering every inch of both arms—further evidence of his many incarcerations. His short brown hair, which he was constantly combing back, was starting to go grey at the temples. His eyes were usually hidden behind dark black sunglasses, which were part of his uniform that also included a starched, white t-shirt, a Pendleton shirt, khakis and black Hush Puppies.

“These young *vatos* nowadays don’t know how to act. They don’t even know how to fight fair. All they know is pulling out a gun and firing at whoever they don’t like. They don’t care who they kill. When I was growing up we respected our barrio and didn’t shoot people without a good reason.”

“Yeah, it’s crazy out here,” I said.

“Man, keep studying, because when you are a lawyer, you can defend us,” he would always say. My mother had apparently told the neighbors I wanted to become a lawyer. “You know that L.A.P.D. cops are some ruthless mother fuckers.”

“I know,” I responded, even though I really didn’t know how bad it could be and hoped to never find out.

“Stay in school,” he would tell me, “so you don’t wind up like me and my brothers.” His four younger brothers were all gang members and had followed in his footsteps. They did not have much of a choice, coming home every day to a group of Manuel’s cholo friends—members of the Varrío Nuevo Estrada gang (“V.N.E.”)—sitting in front of their house, drinking and carrying on. Sooner or later, his brothers would be initiated into the gang and lead the same life.

“O.K., Manuel. I will. Stay cool. Your mom is happy you’re home. So try to stick around for a while.” But within a few weeks, he would always be gone again. The need for drugs would always lead him back to prison. The last I heard, he was sent back to prison on a parole violation. Yet, I will always remember his words of encouragement. Even if he had given up on himself, he still believed it was possible for someone like me to beat the odds.

My best friend Carmen’s apartment, where she lived with her mother and brother, was about a twenty-minute walk from my house. One Saturday night, right before I was about to leave for college, I walked there, down Eighth Street, past the Wyvernwood Apartments and the Estrada Courts Housing Projects, to Lorena Street. From this side of the projects you could not see the beautiful murals that had been painted onto the walls of the projects’

buildings. The Estrada Courts projects were originally constructed in the early 1940s. Starting sometime in the 1970s, local artists began to paint murals on the walls reflecting Chicano culture, including Aztec images, United Farm Workers' symbols, and a portrait of Ché Guevara next to the words "We are not a minority!!"

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*"...it still made me nervous to walk through those projects..."*

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I always loved those murals, especially the one of the Virgin of Guadalupe. They were powerful symbols and a source of pride for the community. But, it still made me nervous to walk through those projects, never knowing if someone might approach me, looking for trouble. "Where you from?" is the question cholos ask when they want to know if you are from a rival gang. In V.N.E. territory, saying you were from "White Fence" could get you killed, or at least beat up badly. Luckily, because I did not dress like a cholo, I was not usually asked that when I walked through there on warm days toward the Costello Park pool.

Someday soon, it will just be a memory, I thought to myself. Since Carmen and I both recently graduated from Roosevelt High School, and were just about to leave for college, someday soon was right around the corner. It was 1980, and we were ready to move on.

"Baby!" she exclaimed, as she opened the front door of her apartment.

"What's up?" I responded.

"Let me just put on my lipstick and I will be ready to go," she replied. "Hey, did you hear about Tomás?"

"No, what happened?"

"He died last week."

"What?"

"Yes, he died, believe it or not," she said.

Tomás was the local car thief. He grew up in the neighborhood, but by the time he was a teenager, he was known for stealing cars, and especially for stealing and selling car stereos. It was said he could break into any car in under a minute. He would sell the stereos cheap and buy drugs.

"He was at his mother's house, sitting in a chair, when he just fell over onto the floor," Carmen said as she applied lipstick. "The ambulance came and took him to

General Hospital. They had to wait for over an hour before they finally saw a doctor because of all the people waiting. The doctor told his mom that his heart finally gave out after taking so many drugs."

"No way," I said.

"Yeah, maybe it will be in the paper."

"Come on," I responded. "You know they do not write about us in the paper—much less about a drug addict in Boyle Heights who keels over."

"Yeah, you're right," Carmen said. "It won't even make it into *La Opinión!*" We both laughed for a minute, until we realized it was not funny on so many levels.

"His mother is devastated. She wants to go back to Mexico now that her only son is gone," Carmen said. "She came here to give him a better life and all he did was give her problems. You know she always took care of him even when he would steal from her. Maybe if she had kicked him out as soon as he started using, he would have straightened out. Who knows? I guess she did not want him to live on the streets."

"It's hard to say," I responded. "All I know is that poor lady wakes up at dawn every day to catch the bus and go clean other people's houses. She deserves better than that."

I remember I would often see Tomás on the street, looking strung out. First he smoked weed, then angel dust, then he snorted and free-based cocaine. God knows what else he did. All I know is the more expensive the drug, the more cars he had to break into. He asked me for money a few times, but he was never a jerk about it when I said no.

"Yeah, it's really sad. They said he just got saved at Victory Outreach, so hopefully he went to a better place," Carmen said wiping away a tear. "I don't know why I am crying, he was just some *ladrón* who couldn't keep it together. He's probably the one who stole my stereo."

"Don't worry," I said to her, "soon you will be at San Francisco State, and I will be in New York City. Let's just try to have a good time tonight and forget about all these problems. Better days are coming, *mija*."

"O.K.," she said. "Let's go." Her long black hair fell just below her waist, and the freckles on her face, which she hated, gave her so much character. She was always so alive and vibrant in a way that few people are—always in the moment and unafraid of her emotions.

In her apartment building's parking lot, as we got inside her small, blue Datsun to head to a party, we heard a woman screaming. We looked at each other, and then looked around. We saw a woman being slapped and kicked by a man on the other side of the large parking lot. He was holding her in place by grabbing her hair and pulling her forward toward the ground, and then punching and kicking her, and finally throwing her down on the floor. We froze for a minute, not knowing what to do. Then, before we knew it, it was over. He went back inside as she laid on the ground sobbing and trying to pull herself together.

We went over to her. She was about 30 years old,

and very petite with short brown hair. Her face was swollen from the blows, and her make-up was running down her face. Her clothes were dirty from being thrown down onto the floor, and one of her sleeves was torn and coming off. We picked her up off the ground, and began to ask her if she was all right. She was crying and saying in Spanish that she was O.K. Just leave her alone, she kept saying. I did not know what to do, and would have walked away at that point. But Carmen continued talking to her and telling her to come inside with us so she could get cleaned up.

She finally agreed and we went back into Carmen's apartment. Bruises were starting to form on her arms and legs. She washed her face and kept saying it was her fault; that her husband works hard; and, she needs to learn how to keep him happy and not talk back to him.

Carmen wanted to call the cops, but the woman wouldn't do it and wanted to leave as soon as she heard the police mentioned. She was illegal and did not want the cops to get involved. Besides, she had kids at home, and she needed to get back to them. Her husband would be mad if she did not go home soon, she kept saying.

"He just beat the shit out of you, and now you are afraid he will be mad if you don't go back? You really need to get away from that asshole," Carmen told her in Spanish. "It doesn't matter if you don't have papers. The cops will still arrest him and you can get a restraining order."

"*Así es*," the woman replied, "that's the way it is. When you are married, you will see how it is. Me and my kids are much better off here than in my country, even though my husband hits me sometimes." And, with that, she left.

"If that's the way it is," Carmen said, "then I am never getting married."

On the way to the party, we drove in silence for a while, both of us trying to digest what had just happened. Another reason to get out of this town, I thought, to try and find something better than here.

"If I were that woman," Carmen said, "I would find a gun and shoot that asshole."

"You just need to let off some steam," I told her, trying to make things better. But, I knew she meant it. "You did everything that a person could do to help her."

"I know. On top of everything else, now my mom doesn't want me to go to San Francisco," she said.

"What? But you already accepted the offer from San Francisco State."

"She wants me to stay in L.A., and can't understand why I don't want to marry Lucio."

"Lucio? Don't get me started . . ."

"I'm not going to marry him. *Ni loca!* I'm not going to wind up watching him drink himself to death in front of the T.V. every night. But she thinks he is a good catch because he is part of the Teamsters Union. He makes good money and he does love me. But, I can't see it and I have told him that many times."

"Yeah, I thought you made it clear to him a while

back," I said.

"I did. But my mom says men like that are hard to find."

"Yeah, they are hard to find when the rent is due!" We both laughed. "I'm sorry," I said. "I don't mean to laugh at your man."

"He's not my man. He just paid a lot of attention to me. When my mom had to stay overnight taking care of her boss's kids, he would come and check in on me, and bring me food. He really listened to me and made me feel better. I remember being so afraid when I had to stay in the apartment at night with just my little brother. It was nice to have him around."

"Yeah, I hear you. But his motives were not that pure."

"I know. But he really did help me, no matter what he was really after. He was kind to me and my brother; and, I never did anything with him that I didn't want to do. Anyway, my mom said I should find a job and marry him. She doesn't understand what I will be doing in San Francisco alone, so far away from my family."

"She means well, but this is the best thing you could do," I said. "When you graduate you can come back, get a good job, and really help her. You know, people think I am crazy to go to New York. My supervisor told me I will only last a semester. He said Mexicans can't take the cold weather. All I know is in a week, I will be in New York City and won't be thinking about that measly job anymore."

"Yeah, really. Just ignore him. *Pura envidia*," Carmen said. "I told my mom not to worry. But I'm worried about her and my brother. I hope they will be all right." I saw her eyes water as she said this, and I knew how hard it would be for her to go. "She really depends on me."

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*"So many people dream  
of coming to Los Angeles,  
and here we just wanted  
to get out."*

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When we arrived at the party, the disco music was blaring and the D.J. was already making the crowd move. "Take Your Time (Do It Right)" by the S.O.S. Band was playing. Carmen was dancing almost as soon as we got there, after running into some friends who pulled her onto the dance floor. I watched her for a bit, knowing that

the music was helping her burn off the emotions brewing inside of her.

A sharply dressed dude walked by wearing a slick, black leather jacket, with several gold chains around his neck. He was handing out flyers with images of Donna Summer and Cerrone on them. They announced the next house party featuring the latest local D.J. who could make the music seamless. Most of these parties were in someone's house or backyard. Pay a few dollars and you were in. I took the flyer, but I knew this would be the last East L.A. house party for me.

Just then "Funky Town" came on by Lipps, Inc. The crowd was jumping to that song, and I could see Carmen looking my way and singing the words to me. I am really going to miss her, I thought. I knew she was thinking about moving on to the next phase of our lives as she danced. The thought of Roosevelt High School students competing with prep school graduates made us both a little scared, and we were trying to block out all of the negative energy that holds people back. It is easy to believe those who tell you that you are just not good enough.

So many people dream of coming to Los Angeles, and here we just wanted to get out. But it is not Boyle Heights that people dream of visiting. It's the sunny beaches and Hollywood Boulevard where people come wanting to be a star. It's Beverly Hills and the billboards on Sunset Boulevard that people come from all over the world to see. The dreams in Boyle Heights are the small victories, like a better life than the one you had in the country you left behind, or the hope that your children will finish school and stay out of trouble. It is the quintessential American dream—that one day your children will be better off than you—that brings people to Boyle Heights. And, in our own way, we were the realization of those dreams, making a way out for ourselves, but never forgetting where we started.

We wound up that night at King Taco, on the corner of Soto Street and Brooklyn Avenue (now known as Cesar Chavez Avenue), before heading home. This is where Hillary Clinton would eat twenty-eight years later during her first presidential campaign. We ordered our *carne asada* tacos and *horchata*, hoping they would absorb the alcohol from the party so our parents would not smell it on us when we got home.

"My father says I like to go out too much and I need to get serious if I am going to study at Columbia University," I told Carmen as we finished our tacos.

"I know. My mom tells me the same thing. But, hey, you have always taken care of business."

"I know he just wants me to do well. But, I've been working all summer to save money, and I need to go out on the weekends and have some fun."

"I know you will do well, *mijo*," Carmen said. "You've got it in you. Just don't get carried away and you will be fine. I can't believe that you are going to be 3,000 miles away!"

"I know. I can't believe it either. I've never been

anywhere else but here, and now I am going to be all the way across the country."

Sitting there, watching the people go by, I saw an elderly woman selling roses. I watched a happy couple pick out a bouquet. I could also see mariachis walking home from playing music at the bars; and, a nicely dressed group of pretty girls, stopping off to eat on their way home from a club. A metal flake blue low-rider pulled up filled with about six cholas. Their thin eyebrows, heavy-duty eyeliner and big eyelashes were meant to make them look like tough girls. But here, no one seemed impressed as they exited their Chevy Impala to place their order. They were just hungry, like the rest of us, and politely waited their turn in the long line.

I thought about the randomness of who makes it out of here. Some families have lived in Boyle Heights for generations. Carmen and I, and several other classmates, were getting ready to leave to go to college, and yet so many others remained behind. Many were caught up in the traps that can ruin one's life, or stayed because of social and cultural expectations. While I knew that I would miss my family and friends, I also knew that this was my beginning, not my ending.

Years later, though I had not lived in Boyle Heights for over twenty years, it would come back to me repeatedly in vivid dreams. In those dreams, I would be looking at houses in my old neighborhood. Those were the houses that I passed by when I walked to high school. Back then, they seemed bigger and nicer than where my family lived. I later dreamed that I bought one of those houses, and felt happy and at home living there. My subconscious mind does not seem to remember the gangs, graffiti or any violence, just simple beginnings and hopefulness – that brief time in one's life when, despite all evidence to the contrary, anything seems possible.



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## CUÍDESE

### FIRST-GENERATION SELF-CARE

by JESSICA HOPPE

It's hard to concentrate on what a doctor is saying when there's a kitchen timer in the room but I tried my best. The New York City clinic that takes my insurance is responsible for the care of hundreds of people each day. Their efficiency is military but their urgency is callous. I've made this appointment every six months for the last eighteen years but this time, I was seeing a new doctor.

I was diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome when I was eighteen years old. My mother suffered from the same condition and was forced to have a partial hysterectomy after an untreated cyst grew to the size of a cantaloupe in her abdomen. Latinas with PCOS carry the most severe phenotype, both in terms of hyperandrogenism—high-levels of androgens (male sex hormones, such as testosterone)—and metabolic criteria, a cluster of biochemical and physiological abnormalities associated with the development of cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. Post-op my mother was able to overcome these predispositions—she lost half her body weight and felt physically healthy for the first time in her life. She had just turned forty.

Soon after her surgery, I started my period and decided then that I would do my best to look after my health. *Me iba a cuidar.* And I have. I take whatever symptoms I experience seriously because I don't want what happened to her to happen to me. Which means I spend a substantial amount of time with cold metal instruments poking around my reproductive organs, though not nearly often enough to be considered responsible.

Mostly, because I'm afraid. I worry that I won't be able to have children when I'm ready. It wasn't my wellbeing that got me to the clinic recently, but my need to know if the pain in my belly would one day prevent me from giving birth.

I didn't have to wait long to see the doctor—like I said, they're efficient. A young nurse began the appointment, hurriedly processing my basic information: name, date of birth, number of sexual partners. In the exact same tone, she asked me the most intimate questions conceivable: “What kind of sex are you having? Oral, anal, vaginal? Any

pregnancies? Is anyone hurting you at home? Did someone try to prevent you from coming here today?” She recorded my answers like a stenographer, without a glance in my direction. Before I could say more, she was swabbing my finger with alcohol and taking my blood. To break the silence, I asked if she'd seen the HBO documentary on Elizabeth Holmes, the young woman who had promised to revolutionize blood testing. “Yeeeeesssss,” she exaggerated, making eye contact for the first time.

“She knew the right people,” the nurse concluded about Holmes. I agreed enthusiastically, hoping she'd say more, when the doctor burst in with the subtlety of a jack-in-the-box. The softness I'd labored for in the nurse's demeanor evaporated immediately. Any sense of allyship was gone as she cranked the dial of a white kitchen timer, placing my body on the doctor's assembly line.

The first order was to take off all of my clothes and sit at the edge of the sticky plastic bed—breasts bare, shoulders back. Nothing makes me feel as shy as these large imperfect glands of mine can, but I'm more frightened of breast cancer, so I follow instructions. I struggled to keep pace with the doctor's frenetic questioning. “So where do you feel the pain? Here? How long have you been feeling it?” I lay back for a PAP when what began as routine became agony as she removed the speculum and began using her hand. “Oh, I should have warned you,” she said but continued applying pressure through my anus, palpating for cysts attached to my ovaries. My body writhed and curled like the red Miracle Fish I used to hold playfully in my palm as a kid. I prayed she'd look at me with an ounce of the curiosity I had once paid to that piece of cellophane, waiting for it to reveal my fortune. When she didn't, I gripped the edge of the bed and tried to breathe, ashamed that the kitchen timer had a larger presence in this room than I did.

As I dressed, my mind and body went to war. I started shaking but told myself I was just cold. The doctor silently made notes in my file and the only sound between us was the ticking of the timer. I resented being rushed and yet I forced myself to move faster.

As I pulled the curtain back, the nurse returned to the room.

She said without looking at me, “It’s negative.” “What’s negative?” I asked. “HIV,” doctor and nurse replied in unison. I wanted to sit down beside the doctor and ask her about my procedure, tell her about the sudden symptoms I was feeling but when the alarm went off, my time was up. I excused myself with a chorus of sing-song-y “okays” and “thank yous” when I really wanted to say, “Wait, what just happened?” But I didn’t feel I was in a position to question her procedure or—God forbid—burden a doctor with my medical issues.

I passed three nurses on my way out. I thanked each one as the beat of my heart began to pound like a drumline. I was sweating and trembling all at once, I felt like I was underwater. But the only words that came out of my mouth were “thank you.” And all I could do was smile.

I made it to the front desk to schedule a follow-up appointment in two weeks and realized that if I let go of that counter I would fall down. I couldn’t speak. My brain tripped my legs and I toppled over like a domino.

Nurses rushed to stabilize me. The back of my neck was cold and wet. I could barely hear the questions they were asking as one poured glucose water down my throat. I felt every pair of eyes in that waiting room pitying me — labeling me “sick.” I hadn’t realized that people thinking I was ill would make me feel so ashamed.

As I rested in one of the attending rooms, I thought about my mother. I wished she were there with me and I wondered how many times she’d pretended she was fine instead of asking for help. Studies have consistently found that Latinx people are the racial and ethnic group least likely to go to the doctor. Many lack a primary care physician and more than half abstain from annual check-ups. While access is a major deterrent, a Pew Hispanic Center study reported that half of the Latinos who did not seek medical care were US-born and had a high school diploma—45 percent had health insurance.

After my appointment, when I told my sisters, they questioned why I didn’t tell the doctor to stop when the procedure became painful. It made me so angry at myself. Why couldn’t I speak up?

I remembered my mother crying, isolating herself and acting out as the effects of PCOS gripped her body. She said nothing and no one cared enough to read the signs. Her mental illness was labeled hysteria and her weight gain, laziness. As an immigrant speaking English as a second language, with three children, and from a low-income household, she struggled to navigate the demoralizing labyrinth of our health care system.

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*“As a child,  
I couldn’t understand  
all that she faced...”*

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There were many times growing up when my mother’s suffering made me feel unsafe. As a child I couldn’t understand all that she faced but I developed her same prideful tolerance for pain and a debilitating syndrome of smallness in the face of authority. It took many years of therapy for me to begin to separate her reality from my own, and to stop converting people’s treatment of me into the value of my worth.

Last week I returned for my follow-up and asked the doctor if she could listen to all of my questions before interrupting, no timer. I assured her I wouldn’t take any more time than necessary but that I needed to address my concerns and to get comprehensive answers to my questions. I wasn’t able to swallow back my tears, but she did give me twenty whole minutes. Not once did I mask or minimize the pain I was there to address. And not once did I look around to find someone else strong enough to advocate on my behalf.



Jessica Hoppe is a first-generation Honduran-Ecuadorian writer. Her work has appeared on ABC News and in *The New York Times*, *Vogue*, *Paper Magazine*, *GEN mag*, and elsewhere. She is working on her first book, lives in New York City with her partner, and still visits her family in New Jersey every Sunday.

## CHRISTMAS ON FIRST STREET

by CARMEN BACA

I was five when Christmas changed. That was the year I learned humility and gratitude at my mother's hands. It would be a long time before I learned what "visions of sugar-plums" represent, but that was the year I discovered how human kindness gave hope to those with little. My revelation happened in the front room of our modest home on First Street. My eyes focused on the children outside in the cold of that Christmas Eve night, my mother's words echoed in my mind, and my heart opened to compassion...

First Street in the small New Mexico town where I grew up consisted of middle and middle-lower classes. It was the last block before the street which featured the back sides of motels and restaurants lining Route 66. The other side of the highway held the last three blocks of the town: the poor section. Beyond them were the railroad tracks and flat plains to the horizon.

First Street residents were Hispanic and included custodians, maintenance and factory workers, and cooks—the blue collar employees who made up the middle class in the sixties. Most of the women prided themselves on their roles as homemakers. The men took care of the yards and exterior of the houses. The women ruled the inside with honey-do lists the men tackled. We children played in the newly-paved street between the houses until darkness drove us inside. It was a content little block of *conocidos* from one end to the other—everyone knew everyone.

The school we kids attended was on Fourth Street, and it was my first encounter with a predominantly white community. Teachers of grades one through five were all white, save one. The ratio of us Hispanic kids in our class

was about one to five. Through most of the year when we were instructed in square dancing (instead of Spanish waltzes), when we were reprimanded for speaking Spanish, when we read the tales different than those our parents taught at home, we learned more about others' cultures rather than our own.

Preparations for Christmas included learning the popular carols and reading Christmas stories foreign to us, so lines like "visions of sugar-plums" in children's heads meant little. What were sugar-plums, anyway? However, at Christmastime the school acknowledged us Hispanics in the community and included two of our traditions because they involved the children and teens' participation through the chorus and band classes: performances of *Los Pastores y Las Posadas*. The residents of First Street took the initiative to keep the third custom alive, the one which directly affected the children and families in need: the tradition known as *Pidiendo Oremos*.

During the week before we were let out for Christmas break, the play known as *Los Pastores*, the Shepherds, was performed in the packed school auditorium. It reminded us all how important it was to live by following Christ's teachings and avoiding temptation. *Los Pastores*, similar to medieval morality plays, featured the shepherds en route to Bethlehem to meet the Christ child. In summary, the shepherds, portrayed as lazy and simple-minded, became distracted by temptations. The play entailed them making the journey to meet the Christ child half-heartedly until they met a hermit whose wise words, delivered as a rebuke and the voice of conscience, forced

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“...we went to our house or one of theirs for bizcochitos and eggnog, with a stronger version for the adults.”

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them to reconsider and to keep their final destination in mind. The devil appeared throughout the play, enticing the shepherds to stray from their purpose. When the character of the archangel Gabriel interceded and banished the devil before announcing the birth of the Christ child, the play ended with the shepherds' arrival and presentation of gifts to the holy family. I remember leaving the auditorium thoroughly entertained but also reminded by my parents, aunts and uncles of the moral of the play. They never missed an opportunity to educate my cousins and me before we went to our house or one of theirs for *bizcochitos* and eggnog, with a stronger version for the adults.

A few nights after, we attended another performance in the form of a procession called *Las Posadas*, The Inns. It was the reenactment of Joseph and Mary's journey to find shelter. Joseph, with the pregnant Mary on their burro, went from one end of the auditorium to the other, encountering different cardboard facades of houses where he sang his verse, asking for shelter for his expectant wife. At the first house, the door opened to reveal the family waiting for the travelers where Joseph sang the first verse:

<i>En el nombre del cielo*</i>	<i>In the name of heaven</i>
<i>Os pido posada,</i>	<i>I ask you for shelter,</i>
<i>Pues no puede andar</i>	<i>For my beloved wife</i>
<i>Mi esposa amada.</i>	<i>Can go no farther.</i>

The family inside replied in song, explaining they were not an inn and closing the door on the couple, who moved to the next "house." The characters of the inn owners sang their verses of negative replies, each with excuses why they had no room for the holy family. Finally arriving at the last inn, Joseph and his wife were given shelter in the barn by the owner who sang:

<i>Entren santos peregrinos,</i>	<i>Come in, sainted pilgrims,</i>
<i>Reciban este rincón</i>	<i>Receive this corner</i>
<i>No de esta pobre morada</i>	<i>Not of this poor dwelling place</i>
<i>Sino de mi corazón</i>	<i>But of my heart</i>

<i>Esta noche es de alegría</i>	<i>This night of happiness</i>
<i>De gusto y de regocijo</i>	<i>Of pleasure and joy</i>
<i>Porque hospedaremos aquí</i>	<i>Because we offer hospitality here</i>
<i>A la Madre de Dios Hijo</i>	<i>To the Mother of the Son of God</i>

As the notes of the last word echoed in the auditorium, the bittersweet emotions of sadness for the plight of the holy family mingled with the joy of the birth of our Savior. From the very young to the very old, the reenactment never failed to affect us; the season of charity was upon us.

Which was why those families of First Street who could afford it bought a little extra to cover for those who had no money to spare for the final and most personal of our traditions. Christmas Eve had us all preparing for the tradition of *Pidiendo Oremos*, Asking for Prayers. It can best be explained as a blend of trick-or-treating and caroling, for lack of a better description. However, this custom, like most of our Hispanic traditions, originated in religion. The children who would participate prepared by readying flour sacks, better than paper bags for holding weight. The adults on the block prepared by gathering peanuts in their shells, apples and oranges in a bowl or pail. Those who made a bit more money had previously bought hard Christmas candy. A local mercantile store which sold everything from cooking utensils to groceries was the go-to place for those items as well as the most coveted: candy. In the front of the store by the cash register stood a keg, a large barrel filled to the rim with hard candies of all colors and sundry shapes. A scoop-full in a small paper bag was a big item for the *gente* who could afford them.

On Christmas Eve when Christmas lights illuminated the windows where the trees were displayed, the children went from house to house asking for prayers. They stood in groups before the front doors and sang:

<i>Oremos, oremos,*</i>	<i>We pray, we pray,</i>
<i>Del cielo venemos,</i>	<i>From heaven we come,</i>
<i>Angelitos semos,</i>	<i>We are angels,</i>

<i>Si no nos dan Oremos, Ya no volveremos. A las señoras caseras, Alguinaldos pedimos. Con mucha alegría, Con mucho contento, Vamos celebrando, Este nacimiento. Denos aquí, si nos han de dar, La noche es larga, Y hay mucho que andar.</i>	<i>If you don't give us prayers, We will never return. To the housekeepers, New Year's gifts we ask, With much happiness, With much contentment, Let us celebrate, This birth. Give us here, if you will give, For the night is long, And we have lots to walk.</i>
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Their singing brought the people to their doors. When the group of about a dozen stopped before our house, I remember peering from behind my mother's skirts at the children gathered at our front door. The few familiar faces were those of the kids I knew came from the streets behind ours. Divided by a highway, their world consisted of dirt roads lined with adobe houses which had wood-burning stoves and *fogones* for heat instead of gas, kerosene lamps in place of electricity, and outhouses instead of indoor plumbing.

My mother held the door open, and their voices filled our living room with their song asking for prayers. After my mother praised them, they stepped forward one by one, no shoving, no greed, only one child after the other, holding their flour sacks open for the treats she gently placed inside. The colored Christmas bulbs of the tree illuminated the group in the colors of the rainbow. Red-cheeked faces, mouths breathing vapor from the cold, eyes bright with humility peered back at me. As young as I was, I felt the filling of emotion in my heart that we gave the children joy on this special night. With many shouts of "*muchas gracias*" and "*feliz navidades*," the children clutched their treasures and smiled their gratitude.

I remember asking my mother why I couldn't participate in pleading for prayers—it looked like fun. To this day I remember her words. "You have everything you want. There is no need for you to ask for prayers. You are already blessed. Those children," she motioned with her head toward the retreating group, shoulders hunched against the cold of the harsh winter and trudging through the snow to the next house, "they have no presents under their trees. They have no trees, no lights in their windows," her voice broke a little, and then she broke my little heart a little more, "that flour sack is probably their only Christmas present. And it will be shared by their entire families. We are blessed to have enough to give those *familias* a bit of joy tonight."

I stood in the carpeted front room of our modest home, the warmth of the gas heater on my back. My new Christmas robe and slippers enveloping me in comfort. Bizcochitos and egg nog for my mom and me, chocolate-

covered cherries, dad's favorites, and a small glass of Mogan David wine on the coffee table for him. The beautiful tree with the bubble lights, glass ornaments, and glimmering tinsel lost a bit of magic that night. The abundance of my life I was learning to take for granted even at age five lost a little of its hold on me that night. My heart learned empathy, and I remember praying harder and shedding tears into my pillow later that the world could use more charity, more goodwill from the haves to the have nots.

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Carmen Baca taught high school and college English for 36 years before retiring in 2014. Her command of English and her regional Spanish dialect contributes to her storytelling style. Her debut novel *El Hermano* published in April of 2017 became a finalist in the NM-AZ Book Awards program in 2018. Her third book, *Cuentos del Cañón*, received first place for short story fiction anthology in 2020 from the same program. To date, she has published 5 books and 43 short works thus far in online literary magazines and anthologies. She and her husband live a quiet life in the country.

## AMERICAN VS. MEXICAN TOOTH FAIRIES KEEPING UP WITH CROSS-CULTURAL LIES TESTS PARENTAL PATIENCE

by CHRISTINE GRANADOS

At eight-months pregnant in November in 2002, I explained to my mother-in-law, that her grandchild I was carrying was not going to be raised with the commercialism and lies of the Christmas season. In my best psychology 101 and Chicano studies courses speak, I waxed on about how lying to my child about Santa would undermine his trust in me and in all people. I said my child would grow up knowing the truth about this made-up and frankly colonialist holiday that perpetrates the myth of an all-good, all-knowing elderly, jolly White man. I said this surrounded by 100 Santa Claus figurines in the middle of my mother-in-law's living room. This woman, who raised four children to adulthood in Central Texas, including my husband, let me know, in no uncertain terms, much like a Southern belle mafia boss that I needed to hush my mouth and listen. She said, "Bless your heart," then gave me a smile that showed all her perfect teeth, "My grandchild will believe in Santa Claus as long as I am his Nano."

I abandoned my psychology and Chicano studies class ideas, much like I did the actual courses that I had failed as an undergraduate at the University of Texas at El Paso, and I embraced the all-American mythologies and folklore that I was raised with along the Texas-Mexico border, including the tooth fairy.

When our youngest child started kindergarten, the drama of the event was punctuated by his losing his very first tooth, and we marked the occasion with plenty of hoopla and a round of ice cream. Inside the penultimate capitalistic business franchise with its scary white-faced, red haired clown, as my husband and I watched our children

climb up multi-colored plastic boxes, we plotted how we were going to introduce our youngest to the concepts of private property, voluntary exchange, capital accumulation and price system.

"I think we should put a quarter under his pillow," my husband said.

"What are you 100 years old? What can he buy with 25 cents – a gumball?" I said.

"Yeah, he'd probably have a hard time chewing without his tooth," he laughed.

"We'll give him a dollar," I said. "That's what his older brother got and that's what he'll get."

"I think it's too much," my husband said.

"If I left it up to you, you'd leave a Treasury Bond under his pillow," I said.

"What's wrong with that?"

I didn't dignify that with a response but said, "I've got this."

When nighttime fell, I literally and figuratively forgot all about the tooth. I realized this at 4 a.m. when our last child woke me up with a trembling voice, "The toof fairy didn't come."

Groggy and angry that I was awakened when it was still dark, something touched my eyeball and I blinked. It was his evidence, the forgotten incisor. He was showing it to me.

Fully awake, I began to panic when I realized I forgot to put the dollar bill under his pillow. Trying to shake off the guilt of my anger just a minute earlier, I was seized by a more profound guilt as I remembered the conversation

he had had with his brother several hours earlier, when we were eating ice cream.

His older brother reminded him that when he had lost his tooth in El Paso, he got a visit from the American and Mexican tooth fairy and he got a lot of money.

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*“Because, mijo, here in  
El Paso we live so close to the  
border that the Mexican tooth  
fairy comes too.”*

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He had the good luck of losing his tooth during our annual trip to my hometown of El Paso. In addition to the tooth fairy, both my parents, my sister and my brother slipped money under his pillow, so the oldest raked in five dollars on one tooth. He was thrilled but confused when he found the large sum the next day. He asked, “How come I only get \$1 at home.” Despite being fully awake then, I was at a loss for words.

Thankfully his grandmother, my mother, who has also raised four children to adulthood was quick on her feet, said, “Because, mijo, here in El Paso we live so close to the border that the Mexican tooth fairy comes too.”

I thought, “Great. Now, I’m going to have to keep up with another lie.” These grandmothers are going to be the end of me, and I wished that I hadn’t dropped those college courses.

“Maybe she didn’t like my tooth,” the youngest said, which snapped me back to the present reality that I was at a loss for words again.

Without my mother or mother-in-law to rescue me, I mumbled, “She doesn’t forget.” Then cursed myself for giving the tooth fairy a gender, which would be another thing that I would have to remember. “Go back to your room and lay down. I’ve gotta go to the bathroom. I’ll be in in a minute.”

I was stalling, which worked, because an answer came to me. I jumped out of bed and felt for the man-of-the-house’s wallet in the dark, then took out a five dollar bill. I was down the hall before I realized it was a five, and I had to go back to get a smaller bill.

An annoyed hiss from the bed said, “What’s wrong

now?”

I said, “We forgot the tooth fairy.”

He sighed, “Oh, my wallet’s—“

“I got it,” I said. “Go back to sleep.”

With the dollar bill in hand, I headed toward his room, which had the overhead light shining, a quilt and pillow in a pile on the floor and a little chubby boy rummaging through the sheets on the bed for cash.

As he lifted his sheets overhead, he said, “I bet the Mexican tooth fairy wouldn’t forget me.”

Defensively, I told him that the American tooth fairy never forgets and added, “Let me help you look.”

As we looked, I dropped the dollar on the floor and he found it.

I said, “See, see, there it is, you probably just dropped it looking for it.”

He turned the bill over in his hands and squinted as he said, “Why did she leave my tooth?”

In desperation I said, “Because the tooth fairy always leaves the first tooth for the parents to keep. I have your brother’s tooth.”

His large jowls drooped more and he said, “This is my money?”

He walked over to his dresser where he picked up his Backyardigans wallet and opened it. The two dollars he had saved from his allowance were still inside and finally he smiled wide and put the dollar in his wallet and said, “She is real!”



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# THE MILK OF SORROW

## TRANSCULTURATION AND MODERNIZATION IN THE MILK OF SORROW BY CLAUDIA LLOSA

by ERIKA ALMENARA

During the 20th century, the topic of memory has gained importance, especially in regards to Latin American cultural production. The memory under consideration is related to different events and historical periods where the state has exercised an extreme violence against certain populations. This is the case, for example, with the violence against the indigenous Peruvian Quechua-speaker. From 1980 through 2000, the Peruvian state and the Peruvian Communist Party (Sendero Luminoso or Shining Path) engaged in an internal armed conflict that left behind approximately 69,280 victims. Seventy-five percent of these victims were indigenous Quechua-speaking people.

In the context of this conflict, a number of literary texts were published, eventually being categorized as “literatura peruana de la violencia.” Mark R. Cox suggests that since 1982, approximately forty-seven novels that addressed the topic of political violence in Peru have been published (Cox 7). Likewise, a number of movies dealing with this same conflict have emerged, for example those directed by Josué Méndez, Joel Calero, Héctor Gálvez, Adrián Saba, and Rosario García-Montero. According to Gastón Lillo, the tendency of these movies is to approach the conflict from an anthropological and cultural point of view rather than a political one. They are focused on individual problems rather than collective struggles, and they avoid offering moral and

political views of the conflict (Lillo 422). *The Milk of Sorrow* (2015) by Claudia Llosa is part of this group of movies. In it, the director approaches the topic of political violence against indigenous populations from the perspective of personal trauma.

Nonetheless, although the importance of personal trauma is relevant, the presentation of an individual struggle can, at times, obscure other realities taking place under the surface, which is what I will demonstrate in this article. Specifically, I will argue that in *The Milk of Sorrow*, the personal tragedy of an indigenous woman is not only the result of the aftermath of conflict but also of the process of transculturation. This process makes her leave her culture and the memories, traditions and affects attached to that in order to be integrated into and welcomed by the modernizing logic of Lima.

I refer to the term transculturation because it is a key part of the film. The term was first coined by Fernando Ortiz around 1940 in Cuba. Ortiz defined transculturation as a process comprised of several phenomena: deculturation (the loss of cultural elements), neoculturation (the creation of new cultural elements), and acculturation (the adoption of cultural elements from the other culture) (103). In 1982, Rama used the term transculturation in his study of Latin American authors such as José María Arguedas, Gabriel

García Márquez, Juan Rulfo and Augusto Roa Bastos to emphasize the capacity of Latin American writers to rework ‘influences’ from the dominant cultures into their own narratives, combining them in innovative ways with elements from the rural cultures of their particular Latin American regions. Rama stated that these authors’ literary works opened the way for a distinctive Latin American modern literature by utilizing elements of local cultures as guiding formal principles whilst at the same time incorporating literary techniques from the European and U.S. literary avant-gardes (Rama 32–56).

According to Fernando Ortiz, transculturation implies the process whereby two cultures merge, be it through peaceful conflict resolution or through the violent imposition of one culture onto another. According to Ortiz, “... el vocablo transculturación expresa mejor las diferentes fases del proceso transitivo de una cultura a otra, porque éste no consiste solamente en adquirir una cultura ... sino que el proceso implica también necesariamente la pérdida o desarraigo de una cultura precedente, lo que pudiera decirse una parcial desaculturación...” (86). As Ortiz states, the process of transculturation implies the loss of a previous culture but also the inscription of the dominated culture into the dominant one. It must be emphasized that throughout the twentieth century, the term functioned as the specific cultural discourse that the ideology of modernization acquired in Latin America. Thus, the term entailed the symbolic incorporation of peoples and practices persisting in the margins of society or nation into a sanctioned form of representation (Legrás 2008, 4).

More recently, Alberto Moreiras has noted two main uses of the word transculturation. In an anthropological sense it is a descriptive word for any kind of cultural mixing. But, he argues, transculturation also refers to a critical concept, “to an active, self-conscious use of cultural combination as a tool for aesthetic or critical production” (2004, 130). It is this second usage, that of the self-aware combination of cultures that leads to aesthetic production, that I refer to in my analysis of Llosa’s film.

Following this contention, *The Milk of Sorrow* not only represents the repercussions of the violence of conflict on an individual body in what one might term a critical way but also, simultaneously, perpetuates the problematic discourses of transculturation as part of the process of Peruvian modernization. Thus, the film embodies how the notion of transculturation implies making the changes necessary to adapt certain Latin American populations to the most general conditions of capitalist modernization. As Moreiras points out, transculturation operates as a regulative machine for the constant adaptation of backward practices and populations to the demands of a centrally driven modernization, as would be the case of the indigenous Quechua-speaking people of Peru (2001, 186).

*The Milk of Sorrow* has received a great deal of critical attention, having been called post-hegemonic

(Beasley-Murray), deceptive (Tapia) and a non-traditional portrait of female trauma (Maseda), among other things. When the film won the Golden Bear award for Best Picture at the Berlin Film Festival in 2009, many film critics and scholars initiated a debate because they considered that the representation of the indigenous Other in the film was “illegitimate” (Tapia 54). While I would not go so far as to say this, what I will focus on here are the tensions within the film in regards to the continuing dichotomy between indigenous/rural and urban/modern.

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“...*Fausta is presented as a subject that needs to be de-indianized or transcultured...*”

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The main character of *The Milk of Sorrow*, Fausta, is a Quechua-speaking indigenous woman who migrates with her mother to Lima where they live with her uncle and his family in an attempt to escape the violence and horror of the conflict. According to details presented in the movie, members of the Peruvian Armed Forces raped Fausta’s mother while she was pregnant leading her to be traumatized. In the film Fausta is presented as a subject that needs to be de-indianized or transcultured in order to be inserted and integrated into the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural plans of Lima’s governing society. Not only, then, does Fausta stand for the aftermath of violence but also for the ongoing effect of transculturation on the migrant population. In this sense, *The Milk of Sorrow* is, on the one hand, a film that can be read as an attempt to restore cultural memory, but on the other exhibits a tension in regards to the ways in which this cultural memory is allowed to exist within the larger modernizing project. I will come back to this point shortly. First, though, in order to demonstrate how transculturation occurs in Llosa’s film, it is important to review the historical and political contexts from which the film emerges.

*The Milk of Sorrow* takes place following the end of the Peruvian internal armed conflict. Along with other scholars (Dajes, Manrique, Méndez, Silva Santisteban), I consider this conflict to be an explosion of what was beneath the surface of a national project founded on exclusion, rejection and racism towards the indigenous population. Peruvian historian Cecilia Méndez, for instance, notes

that the state that was imposed in Peru was ideologically supported by the project of a “republic without Indians” (206). Thus, the independence of the country allowed criollos, the children of European immigrants, to affirm themselves as the dominant social group over a population that was mainly Indian. Because of this, the republican project that emerged after the wars for independence (1820–1826) in the 19th century did not relieve the discrimination and marginalization suffered by the Indians during the three centuries of Spanish colonization (Méndez 207). Thus, the Peruvian Republic established a national identity that excluded a massive amount of individuals especially the “Indians,” despite offering a promise of equality by supposedly considering them to be Peruvian citizens.

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*“[Peru] inherited and  
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discourse...”*

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This marginalization of the Peruvian Indian, refusing to consider him/her as equal to white, urban Peruvians has been maintained and reproduced in different periods of Peruvian history and in the multiple projects that attempted to define Peruvian identity including the periods such as La República Aristocrática (1895–1919) as well as the governments of presidents Nicolás de Piérola (1879–1881 and 1895–1899), Manuel Pardo (1872–1876), Fernando Belaúnde-Terry (1963–1968 and 1980–28 July 1985), Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), among others. This is why scholars affirm that the devastating violence of the armed conflict in Peru between the state and Shining Path was generated by a “profoundly excluding and segregationist state, which inherited and adopted a racist and anti-indigenous colonial discourse, that saw Peruvian society as divided in castes, and that considered Whites intrinsically superior, and Indians inferior, for biological reasons” (Manrique 45–57).

This colonial discourse that survives in Peru is especially focused in Lima and increased because of the migration of Andean people to the capital city. 1940 marks the first large migration of Andean peasants to Lima that dramatically affected the composition of its urban landscape. Thus, the influx of migrants became an important part of the

urbanization process in Lima and, in turn, affected its relation with the Quechua-speaking indigenous men and woman who migrated. They settled primarily in the peripheries of the city, in the spaces that are currently referred to as shantytowns. According to Andrés Necochea Vergara, there were two main factors that motivated these migrations: (i) rural expulsion, and/or (ii) the search for better salaries (8). Despite the rise in numbers, the migrants remained relegated to the margins, however.

*The Milk of Sorrow* brings to the screen a problematic topic that has not been explored enough by Peruvian films, especially if we consider that migration is one of the most relevant consequences of the internal armed conflict. Although the numbers are not exact, approximately half a million Quechua-speakers migrated to Lima during the internal armed conflict (Comité de la Verdad y Reconciliación 627). Since 1980, a new and significant population distribution developed in Lima. As José Matos Mar explains, “In 1984, Lima is a city of foreigners. The multitudes of provincial origins overflowing the urban space, produce deep changes in the style of life of the capital city and they give a new face to it” (73). The migrants represent a radical change in the administration of urban space, but their existence also held ramifications for the state’s plan of furthering capitalism in Lima in an effort to fulfill the promise of modernization. This aim is portrayed in *The Milk of Sorrow* by the way Lima represents the promise of emancipation from the burden of the past and its archaic superstitions (Franco 91).

Generally speaking, the development of capitalism shaped the modern identity of Latin America without taking into account the principles of alterity and difference. The different was understood as “precapitalist,” “feudal,” “residual,” or “local” (Legrás 2000, 92). For the logic of modernization, different populations, oftentimes synonymous with indigenous ones, are archaic, “como una verdadera rémora para el proceso de avance” (Rama 154). Becoming modern meant “overcoming underdevelopment by loosening the drag of those sectors of the population that were stigmatized as ‘downstream,’ ‘unproductive,’ ‘traditional,’ or, to borrow a term coined by Noam Chomsky, ‘unpeople’” (Franco 8). The Andean was dangerous to the elite (the so-called Creoles), because as Gareth Williams points out, the Andes is a threatening cultural space whose potential expansion through migration promises the end of the history of Creole-led modernity and modernization in Peru (245).

Both the arrival and presence of the “cholo”—which is what one who comes from the Andes and who identifies with an Andean tradition is called when he enters Lima—disturb the city’s order, progress, and rationality with his traditions and ways of living. Naturally, these waves of Andean migrants were problematic for the space and rationality of Lima. These people were unwelcome in the city as they interrupted its order and the drive to advance capitalism and fulfill the promise of modernization. The only

way they could be integrated to the capital city was through a process of transculturation, because as Legrás states, this process describes the subjective changes necessary to adapt Latin American populations to the most general conditions of capitalist modernization (2008, 16).

Such is the case of Fausta, the main character of *The Milk of Sorrow*, who arrives in Lima to live with her uncle and his family, escaping the violence and horror of the internal armed conflict.<sup>1</sup> In moving from the Andes to the Coast, Fausta represents many other women who have made this same journey escaping the isolation, the fear, and the damage produced by the violence of the Peruvian state. This is why it is natural to read *The Milk of Sorrow* as a commentary on the legacy of trauma as well as the survival of cultural memory. Nonetheless, the film also presents Fausta's failed struggle to maintain her Andean identity in the face of pressures to completely assimilate her social and cultural characteristics to those of Lima. She is, therefore, forced to go through a process of transculturation, a progression in which the features of her Andean cultural identity are combined with the features of the urban and hegemonic culture of Lima in order to help her serve the larger, modernizing, purposes of the state.

This is not the first time that someone has noticed the mark of transculturation in Llosa's cinematic. Claudia Llosa's first release, *Madeinusa* (2006) also deals with the Andean encounter with the urban space. There is, however, a division regarding the role of transculturation in that particular film. Some scholars have read *Madeinusa* as a positive and unique achievement in Peruvian cinematography (Beasley-Murray, Bedoya, Buntix, Bustamante, Faverón and Forn-Broggi). Others, however, have critiqued what they see as a replication of Eurocentrist ideas that represent the indigenous people as exaggeratedly primitive, irrational and dangerous (Pagán-Teitelbaum, Roca, Vivas, Ardito, Palaversich, and Ubilluz Raygada). Particularly relevant to my reading of *The Milk of Sorrow* today is Ubilluz Raygada's note regarding *Madeinusa* which states that although Llosa's film opens new avenues for the Quechua-speaking woman, it is ultimately unable to imagine anything other than the escape to western modernity (Lima) as the answer to her struggles. In other words, Ubilluz Raygada reads in Llosa's film a fundamental miscomprehension of life in the Andes as well as an implicit assumption that modernity can only be located in Lima.

Similarly, the critics that have noted the role of transculturation in *The Milk of Sorrow* have read it as a positive factor. For instance, in his article "El mar en la

representación cinematográfica de la migración interna en el Perú: de Gregorio a La teta asustada," Pablo Salinas states that transculturation allows for the possibility of a harmonious ending where the two cultural forces between which the protagonist finds herself, the Andean and the rural, undergo a "síntesis reconciliatoria" (443).

What I would argue is that, while transculturation is an important force in the film, and that Llosa presents it as a positive one, *The Milk of Sorrow* falls prey to the same fallacy that undergirds *Madeinusa*, which is to say that the transculturation process assumes that it is the Andean who must assimilate into the modern space of Lima. The first indicator of this positioning is evident in the original title of the film: "La teta asustada." Fausta suffers from this particular malady, one that is supposedly transmitted through the breast milk of pregnant women who are abused or raped during or soon after pregnancy. Kimberly Theidon coined this term in her study on the Peruvian Andes regarding their beliefs on the transmission of suffering and fear from a mother to a baby. The Andeans affirm that feelings can be transmitted from mother to fetus in utero or to the baby through breast milk and blood. According to Theidon's research, it is believed that "La teta asustada" can damage the baby, thus making him or her more likely to suffer from epilepsy (77). Theidon uses the term "La teta asustada" because it exemplifies how painful the memories accumulated in the body can be, how it is believed a person can literally embody a traumatic history.

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*"Fausta ... is marked from  
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and mentally."*

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<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned in this regard that one of the main reasons Andean men and women migrated to Lima during the internal armed conflict is because they had experienced the very worst of those years of violence. Most of the members of the Peruvian Armed Forces did not understand or speak the language of the indigenous, Quechua-speaking people they encountered in the towns in which they fought Shining Path. Because of this, members of the Peruvian Armed Forces often failed to differentiate between members of Shining Path and civilians. Indigenous women, in general, represented a special target for members of the Peruvian Armed Forces who physically and sexually abused Andean women (Degregori et al 346). Although this situation was present throughout the whole country, with responsibility shared between every group participating in the internal armed conflict, 83% of the cases of sexual violence are attributed to representatives of the Peruvian state (Henríquez Ayin 84). Rocío Silva Santisteban explains that the use of sexual violence by members of the Peruvian Armed Forces was a racialized violence, as white women did not experience this kind of violence. When females suspected of being members of Shining Path were mistreated, tortured or raped, they were insulted because of their race. Members of the Peruvian Armed Forces would call these women "chola asquerosa, chola de mierda, india bruta" while they were being raped (Wiese, Ideele Televisión).

Despite not having yet been born during her mother's violent encounter with the Peruvian Armed Forces, Fausta Isidora Janampa Chauca is marked from within the womb and emerges with this legacy implanted in her physically and mentally. Raised in the Andes, she comes from its traditions, its celebrations. After moving to the city with her mother, however, she joins a family that is enmeshed in the "Negociaciones entre la cultura andina y la cultura urbana limeña" (Eve-Monette 2). Her extended family imitates the city-dwellers' modern ways of life, even constructing a swimming pool in their yard and arranging elaborate wedding celebrations for their sons and daughters. As scholars have noted, Fausta's relatives feel legitimated as limeños when they perform these acts, using them as a way to displace the memory of their traumatic past of sexual and physical violence in the Andes (Vich 336).

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*“ Próspero’s definition  
of success as a limeño  
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memories ... modernity  
over tradition.”*

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Thus, the ability to move forward in order to become limeño, for some in the film, is marked by the need to distance oneself from a difficult past, from the trauma they experienced during the internal armed conflict. Such is the case of Fausta's uncle Próspero, who in his speech at her daughter's wedding, marks the changes that have occurred in his family: "Han sido momentos difíciles para la familia, pero la vida se renueva y continúa con nuevas alegrías, y hoy nos toca festejar la vida que a pesar de todo guarda siempre sorpresas hermosas llenas de felicidad. Bailaremos y comeremos hasta la madrugada porque este buffet hoy no se va a ningún lado. Es mi regalo."<sup>2</sup> Próspero's definition of success as a limeño depends upon erasing memories, especially the difficult ones, with new (only happy) memories based on successes in the capital and the accompanying triumph of modernity over tradition.

In this sense, the Andeans themselves collaborate

with the limeños who feel that Andean traditions and celebrations must be replaced, and forgotten, in order for assimilation to take place. Nowhere is this more clear than in Fausta's encounters with a doctor. Upon discovering that she is ill, Fausta's uncle takes her to a hospital where the doctor discovers that she has inserted a potato into her vagina as a means of protecting herself from the effects of the "teta asustada" and from the possibility of being raped. Rather than understanding her tradition, the doctor denies her rationale and, in so doing, her culture. He therefore signals the extent to which the capital and its inhabitants are unreceptive to and even offended by the social and cultural characteristics that Andean migrants bring with them to the city. Rather than incorporate her traditions into his own, or at least attempt to enter into her discourse in order to better explain his concerns to his patient, the doctor imposes his urban knowledge at the expense of Fausta's experience and heritage. This same encounter portrays the urban world as rational and progressive, while the rural is traditional and backward. Thus, according to the doctor, Fausta's belief (the illness) and practice (the potato to prevent rape) are 'irrational' (D'Argenio 25).

Given her inability to express her culture elsewhere, Fausta's only means of expressing her heritage in her new living situation are songs in Quechua. Not only are these songs linguistically related to her past but music is a vital cultural element in the life of the Andean communities. It is used in collective celebrations and dances, of religious and social rituals. Rituals are important visual and narrative moments, and play a key role as they represent the Andean lifestyle and values (D'Argenio 32). Fausta's songs represent a language for expressing and processing a memory that is not only her own personal memory but also the memory of her culture. Indeed, Fausta is not the only person who sings to remember, placing her in a lengthy tradition of musical storytelling. Her mother, shown at the beginning of the film, also sings to remember. In this early scene, superimposed over a black screen, we hear the voice of an old woman singing a song in Quechua. This song, however, is not a folkloric one but a testimony to trauma at the hands of the military. The lyrics tell us:

Maybe some day you will understand how much I cried,  
how I begged on my knees to those sons of bitches. That  
night I shouted, the mountains echoed my screams but  
people laughed. With my pain I fought back saying "you  
were born from a female dog with rabies, that is why you  
have eaten her breasts. Now, then, eat me. Now, then, lick  
me as you did with your mother." This woman singing  
was grabbed and raped that night, they did not have pity  
for my unborn daughter, they did not feel any shame.  
That night they grabbed and raped me with their penises  
and their hands. They had no pity for my daughter who

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<sup>2</sup> Vich offers a short reading of this particular scene within a larger argument regarding the use of the figure of the "cholo" as a selling point for the Peruvian film market. While I consider her argument to be an important one, my own reading insists that not only does the happy cholo help sell the film, it also is part of a much larger tension that relates to the question of transculturation in general and its relationship with cultural production and memory.

was looking from inside. And not happy with that, they made me eat the dead penis of my husband Josefo, his poor dead penis seasoned with gunpowder. With that pain, I shouted “please, kill me and bury me with my husband. I do not understand anything here.”

This song, then, captures not only Perpetua, Fausta’s mother’s past, but Fausta’s past as well. Rather than using a sequence of flashbacks or a narration, the film reveals this past only in Perpetua’s gruesome songs. The relevance of the songs Fausta sings in Quechua is precisely related to memory, to the memory of a trauma but also to the memory of a culture and its history.

Initially, Fausta resists her mother’s song, telling her that she must eat instead. Her mother answers, “I will eat if you sing and water this memory that is drying.” In other words, Fausta’s mother is explicitly asking her to hold a memory that narrates her trauma and her losses. Fausta’s mother then expresses: “I cannot see my memories; it is as if I am not living anymore.” This interchange is particularly revelatory in that it suggests that repeating memories is a way of keeping not only a history of trauma alive but a person, and even that part of keeping a person alive is the memory of the trauma that filled her past. We can also read this as a suggestion that memory storytelling preserves culture, past, and history even when they are entangled with trauma, suffering, and violence. Not only this, but as Rebeca Maseda points out, with her singing Fausta’s mother is inscribing the discourse of the female survivors of this violence (18). Thus, for Maseda, Fausta’s mother not only sublimates her own pain through singing but she also acts as a historian of events that would otherwise be forgotten (18).

Perpetua remains tied to her Andean roots, emphasizing that she “does not understand anything here,” which we can read as an allusion to the new space in which she lives – Lima. I propose that the memory she retains about her trauma, in addition to the memories of her past and her Andean background, is related to her sense of not being able to understand her new home here, Lima. In order for Perpetua to live, as Próspero and his family already did, she needs to forget. She must forget her trauma, along with her past, her background, and, more important, the injustices she and her people faced. Perpetua dies without being able to do this. Read another way, the film proposes that she who does not forget the past in this new modern space, dies. Fausta, in order to have a different fate, must learn from her mother’s example.

This is another indication of how the concept of transculturation is at work in the film. It marks the act of forgetting and abandoning memories and culture as a necessary one in order to create an integrated sense of community in the urban world of Lima. Of course, the problem with this is that transculturation “is always dependent on the possibility of paradigmatically accommodating the historical multiplicity of past times, subsuming them into the time of the nation” (Legrás 2008,

17). Thus, when transculturating by forgetting, Fausta is also leaving behind the injustices she and her people faced, not only during the internal armed conflict but, one might argue, since colonization. Transculturation, after all, produces identities out of disjointed temporalities (Legrás 2008, 18). This is a problem because, instead of addressing them, it erases the violence and injustice of the past in favor of the homogenizing forces of modernity.

As we have seen, *The Milk of Sorrow* portrays the necessity of forgetting an Andean past and an Andean culture in order to be accepted and included in the life of the capital city, Lima. If Próspero finds peace in erasing his past and assimilating into the culture of the city, his sister Perpetua can not do so and is condemned to die. Fausta faces a similar choice in the film when, in order to pay for her mother’s funeral, Fausta takes a job as the maid of a wealthy pianist in Lima. Aida is a white woman who lives in la casa de arriba or “the house above.” Aida’s home is closed off from the space of the informal market next door by a large wall. The market, incidentally, is run by migrants and cholos. The wall, then, separates two worlds and two kinds of memories (Eve-Monette 12).

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*“...a critique of a certain class of Peruvian society that takes advantage of the cultural memories of others...”*

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Aida, a professional musician, is in the midst of a creative crisis. When she hears Fausta’s songs, she proposes a peculiar payment system: for every verse of a song that Fausta gives her to pass off as her own, she gives Fausta a pearl. Fausta knows that she will be able to use the pearls to pay for her mother’s funeral. Prior to this arrangement, Fausta’s singing brought personal pleasure (or lament/catharsis, depending on one’s point of view); it was a way of remembering her Andean past and culture. But this source of enjoyment/catharsis is transformed in the film when it acquires an exchange value once Fausta accepts the agreement with Aida. Fausta’s singing becomes merchandise. Not only this, but in order to become merchandise, her songs must be altered. They must be translated into Spanish so Aida can

understand them (and, unknown to Fausta can pass them off as her own), thereby erasing their vital link to not only the original song creator but to an entire population.

The role of Aida is clearly a critique of a certain class of Peruvian society that takes advantage of the cultural memories of others in order to make them palatable for the consumption of an elite sector of the population by maintaining control of their narrative (both figuratively and linguistically). Not only does Aida profit from Fausta's songs, but she co-opts them, claiming them as her own, and when confronted, she responds by tossing Fausta out of the vehicle.

Despite this important critique of a cultural elite that profits by taking advantage of others, however, there is another, more problematic critique that comes in the form of the relationship between the Andean world and its culture as represented by Fausta and her uncle. If it is true that the modern city has behaved cruelly toward the indigenous population, the film suggests that they are also complicit in the erasure of their past, especially their culture. I say this because not only has Próspero successfully erased his past in order to move into the future, but Fausta erases both her own past and the figure of her mother, placing them at the disposal of a capitalist production managed by the hands of a limeño elite. Furthermore, when, upon realizing Aida's true intentions for the songs, Fausta realizes that she has been violated, albeit not physically, her recourse is to erase her past yet again by burying her mother on the shores of the sea of Lima and by removing the potato permanently. Her potato of protection, representing her Andean values, has not been enough to protect her from the dangers of modern society. Just as in her encounter with the doctor earlier in the film, Fausta is no match for the realities of modern life. Indeed, while the film highlights the value of Andean cultural production by placing it at the center of the storyline, it does so while simultaneously denigrating other pieces of the same (such as, for example, the absurdity of the potato as a means of protection). Thus it is that when Fausta makes the decision to remove the potato permanently, since it was not able to protect her in any case, it is not depicted as a particularly negative decision even though in so doing, she distances herself not only from her past but also from her traditions.

What the film seems to be celebrating is a third option, a way in which both worlds might come together or "reconcile" as Anne Lambright suggest on her article about Llosa's work (162). This is exemplified in the final scene of the film where Fausta, rather than using the money gained from the pearls to bury her mother in their home in the Andes, carries her mother's body to the edge of the sea, choosing the ocean sand over the mountain dirt (Franco 91). This is a significant choice on her part. Caught in the battle between two worlds, Fausta is not meant to choose either but this third, liberating, option.

This decision by Fausta is the culmination of her process of transculturation in which she renounces her own culture and past. As has been noted, Fausta burying her mother in the sea of Lima allows her the opportunity

of abandoning the weight of her Andean past and her trauma (Salinas 121). Thus, the body of the mother works as an allegory of Fausta's Andean memory; it is necessary to bury that memory on the shores of the (capital's) sea before completing her integration into the urban life of Lima and "manejar mejor la transición al mundo mestizo de los migrantes de Lima" (Lillo 443).

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*"...the body of the mother  
works as an allegory  
of Fausta's Andean  
memory..."*

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With this, the body of the mother that was the last element holding Fausta back from fulfilling the process of transculturation and achieving what the other members of her family had achieved by forgetting, is eliminated. By letting this body go, exchanging her memory, her traditions, her trauma and that of her people, Fausta can now integrate into the life of Lima.

Some have read *The Milk of Sorrow* as a film that adopts a horizontal position towards the indigenous communities because it portrays the Andean subject as modern and urban (Lambright 156). This ending, however, precludes, to my mind, the possibility of this reading precisely because the Andean subject only achieves modern status by erasing the tradition, memories and the past. In other words, regardless of its promise of joining, transculturation always entails a losing party when the dominant side assimilates its Other. Transculturation implies the sublation of difference in the transcultural subject. This is clearly demonstrated in the film because while it critiques the cruelty of the capital's elite, by the end of the film, they are clearly the winners. Fausta's recompense for the sale of her songs is, after all, what will allow her to bury the mother, not in her homeland mountains, but on the shores of the sea of Lima. Although ostensibly meaning to show us the possibility of bridging the gap between two worlds, what this film actually shows us is that there is no possibility of extending any bridge via transculturation unless one side is willing to renounce its own culture and past.

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# LA OTRA CARA, STATE AGGRESSIONS, AND REFLECTIONS ON MAYAN AUTONOMY IN GUATEMALA

by CHRISTIÁN GONZÁLEZ REYES

Nationalisms go beyond the geo-political boundaries of the nation-state. Nations and nationalisms are imagined communities (Anderson, 6). In Guatemala, the nation is built on a legacy of colonialism, settler violence towards Indigenous communities, and a set racial hierarchy—where white and ladino are considered superior to Black and Indigenous. The Guatemalan education system becomes a site where history and literary production become crucial in order to *other* the Indigenous. Through depicting the Indigenous as “backwards” and not capable of Eurocentric forms of knowledge, the general Guatemalan population is socialized to believe that Indigenous folks are not capable of being a part of the Guatemalan national imaginary. These active attempts to marginalize Indigenous communities allow for the Guatemalan nation-state to be built on their exclusion, racialization, and cultural and violent genocide.

Thus, this paper intends to work through and argue that the narratives presented in literary productions, like Gaspar Pedro Gonzalez's *La otra cara*, demonstrate how the othering of the inhabitants of Jolomk'u represents the larger systemic and social barriers implemented by the State on Mayans, particularly through institutional aggressions like governmental offices and the education system. In order to show this, I argue: (i) how *La otra cara* brings to the surface the fact that the Guatemalan national identity is built on the othering of Mayans, as it is seen by violent aggressions projected by governmental institutions towards characters like Mekel; (ii) how said structural aggressions become normalized and internalized by Mayans, as is seen by the discourses from community members, Mekel, and Mekel's son, Luin; and, (iii) how Luin's departure from the public-school education system allows for his community to use education and their collectivist values to take important roles in (re)thinking and (re)inventing how an Indigenous autonomy manifests itself through an intellectual autonomy rooted in Maya thought and practice. Then, let us begin by looking at how Guatemalan nationalism is built on marking Mayan communities as the other in *La otra cara*, as is seen by the aggressions carried out by governmental institutions.

The violence by governmental institutions becomes spaces where Mayans are alienated from the national imaginary. In the novel, Mekel, Luin's father, goes

to the municipal offices in order to register Luin's birth, but Mekel is met with hostility from the clerks because the offices are closed due to a national holiday—or the state's apparatus of fashioning “good citizens.” The clerk tells the *ajtz'ib'*, “¡Indio bruto! ¿No te estoy diciendo que ahora es día feriado?” (González, 10). In the opening pages we are given the first few instances of how the construction of race and the othering of Mayans are carried out. Mekel was simply trying to prevent any late fee being assessed on a late registration of Luin's birth and on the print of a late birth certificate. However, Mekel confronts two barriers: (i), he didn't know the national holiday being observed in Guatemala; and because of the first, (ii) Mekel is automatically called a “brute Indian,” someone who does not seem to know what is occurring in Guatemala. Mekel's obliviousness showcases how Indigenous folks are barred from not only being a part of the nation, but also the way they face punishment and systemic barriers because of this created *otherness* violently pushed onto them. As Terry Eagleton writes, “Ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relations into which [folks] enter at a particular time and place; it is the way those class-[and-race]-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated” (Eagleton, 6). The ideology present here is the attitudes and barriers created in order to marginalize, other, and most important, continue the colonial legacy of constructing social categories based on race/skin color. In this instance, it is crucial to understand how Mekel's confusion and frustration become a part of how Indigenous peoples experience these legitimized and perpetuated forms of marginalization and racism. How is it that a supposed citizen not know there is a national holiday being observed; what do we do with the structural—or the governmental/institutional—barriers being used to place the blame on Mekel's supposed ignorance; and, how does Indigenous agency, as observed with the *ajtz'ib'*'s intervention in the situation, become categorized as an aggression towards this Guatemalan nationalism and these agents of the State? Our answers lie in understanding how even though the *ajtz'ib'* mobilizes his social and political capital (his knowledge of Guatemalan law and policy and his ability to speak, read, and write in Spanish), he is still racialized as a “brute Indian” for trying to argue against an agent of the State—a State that was created on the discrimination of

Mayans. How, then, does this structural aggression towards Indigenous peoples continue to manifest itself as an avenue to further other Indigenous folks from being a part of a Guatemalan national identity? We see these aggressions present themselves in the way that Mekel and the *ajtz'ib'* internalize their conditions as Mayans, particularly in the *ajtz'ib'*'s discourse on the national holidays being observed.

Institutional aggressions, therefore, become key in how Luin's community internalizes itself as foreign on their ancestral lands. For example, the *ajtz'ib'* transmits:

—Ellos celebran sus fiestas: Día de la Raza, ¿de qué raza?; Independencia, ¿de quiénes?; de la Nacionalidad, de los Símbolos. Del Trabajo, de esto y de aquello...Nosotros amigo mío, en estas tierras somos como extranjeros en nuestra propia tierra. Somos ajenos [...]. Formamos dos mundos diferentes, dos caminos y dos puntos que llevan la vista hacia diferentes direcciones.

—¿Crees amigo [...] que es posible una unidad, una misma identidad en una sociedad fraccionada de esta manera? [...] Si te das cuenta, nosotros no somos aceptados por la sociedad que maneja los destinos del pueblo, ni somos tomados en cuenta cuando se toman esas decisiones (González, 11).

The interrogations in this dialogue point to some implicit arguments: (i) how do Indigenous peoples navigate being labeled as foreign on their native lands; (ii) in always feeling like a foreigner, what do these holidays even represent for these peoples that are not seen as part of the nation(alism); (iii) will there ever be a point in Guatemala's history where the Indigenous majority will *finally* be able to partake in making decisions that so gravely affect their communities? According to the *ajtz'ib'*—and Gaspar Pedro González for that matter—these questions have been answered the moment the caste system (the Spanish imposed system that created racial categories) was created to abuse and exploit Indigenous labor and sovereignty on native lands. Likewise, if we focus on this constant foreigner complex that our characters feel, then we can begin to understand how they have internalized and work through notions of otherness being placed upon them by the Guatemalan state, non-Indigenous folks, and the symbolic acts, like these national holidays, that further cement the fact that Indigenous folks are not considered a part of what it means to be Guatemalan. Therefore, I argue that in name dropping the holidays and self-reflecting on *who* these national holidays are for, Gaspar Pedro González engages the reader to interrogate how nationalism is built on the marginalization, degradation, and erasure of the most othered—in this case these othered are the various Maya communities. In looking at how González engages the reader, I would pay close attention to how optimism masked behind “se necesitaría una buena voluntad” (González, 11) becomes a failed end to want to strive for a false sense of

a potential national unity that eradicates racism. What do I mean? What I am getting at here is that in the *ajtz'ib'*'s optimism-but-at-the-same-time-disenchantment, we must realize that these colonial institutions will never take into consideration Indigenous folks as part of what it means to be Guatemalan. Why would they? The nation is built on genocide, built on continuously inflicting violence on these folks, and further racializing Indigenous folks in order to keep the Guatemalan national identity whole and coherent. This cycle never ends, not even for Luin, the one who carries the rest of the narration of the novel through his moments of shock and realizations.

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*“...nationalism is upheld  
because of its hypocrisy,  
violence, and perverse  
measures of discrimination  
towards Mayan communities.”*

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Luin's coming to consciousness of being othered by the society around him allows him to reflect on how his traditional beliefs question the racist ideologies permeated in Guatemala. The discourse that Luin shares with his mother gives space to reflections on the racial hierarchies in Guatemala that continue to alienate Luin's community. Luin embarks on a discourse in which he points out the contradictions within the very fabrics that make up the Guatemalan imaginary. He trails on:

—Madre, es difícil de precisarlas porque no nos corresponden en su plenitud. En la escuela aprendí un canto que no entiendo su significado, una llamada Bandera que representa ideas muy bonitas, pero sólo ideas. Unos llamados símbolos patrios, símbolos de lo que debería ser el hombre mismo, pero hasta allí se quedan en símbolos; jamás llegan a ser reales. Unas fiestas: Independencia, Día de la Madre, Día de la Raza, Día del Árbol... y me pregunto: qué independencia, qué madre, si tú como campesina eres sólo madre de dolor, de lágrimas y de trabajo durante toda tu vida: qué raza, si somos una raza abandonada y desechada. Todo lo que me enseñan me hace reflexionar y me pregunto, ¿quiénes inventarían tales cosas y con qué objetivos? (González, 125).

Luin's self-reflection through the discourse at hand gives the reader a look into the normalized conditions that Maya peoples have come to internalize, but they also know that these conditions do not come because they are anything less than human. Instead, Luin through naming and showing the contradictions in the various aspects of Guatemalan nationalism shows how said nationalism is upheld because of its hypocrisy, violence, and perverse measures of discrimination towards Mayan communities. As Aníbal Quijano in *Colonialidad del poder* theorizes:

After the colonization of America and the expansion of European colonialism to the rest of the world, the subsequent constitution of Europe as a new id-entity needed the elaboration of a Eurocentric perspective of knowledge, a theoretical perspective on the idea of race as a naturalization of colonial relations between Europeans and non-Europeans (Quijano, 534-5).

As Quijano points out, Europeans needed a way to legitimize their conquest in the Americas, so they did it through creating binaries of inferiority and superiority where—in the case of Guatemala—the ladino and white Guatemalan would be positioned as superior while the various Mayan communities would be pivoted as inferior. Luin, as González textualizes for us, knows what the theory tells us, however the problem that Luin faces is *how* to combat the coloniality of power and the already-created systemic boundaries that keep his community bounded to poverty and racial inequity. Because of these polemics, Luin's questioning and pointing out that his people are a forgotten and disposable race from the very beginning illustrates that he is aware that he never will be able to fit within the confines of what it means to be a "citizen" of Guatemala. Rather, what Luin does that is crucial is he lays out the contradictions by means of asking the questions of *who* came up with these markers of nationalism and with *what* intentions. This very moment is where Luin not only enters a state of shock—a state where he realizes that he is in a never-ending cycle of violence put into place since the beginnings of colonialism—, but in this state of shock and self-reflection is where the Luin that the reader knew up to this point comes to full consciousness of his material conditions. As Luin breaks from this state, he realizes that partaking in Guatemala's colonial institutions and wanting to assimilate into what it means to be Guatemalan have no use for his community—and certainly not for him. As a result, Luin turns to his education in order to create ruptures in the racist and colonial narratives present up until this point of the novel, allowing for the conception of what an intellectual autonomy will look like for him.

An intellectual autonomy, one that centers the values and ancestral knowledge of Luin's community, is what pushes Luin to reflect on the purpose of the education he received from the ladino school he attended. Luin reflects:

Al término de los ocho años de estudio, hizo un alto en el camino para analizar detenidamente y hacer un balance entre aquella educación ajena que había ido a recibir al pueblo y la que había recibido en su comunidad: sencilla, humilde, pero auténtica y real. No tenía mayores ambiciones, se quedaría en su comunidad para apoyar a su gente hombro con hombro y tratar de utilizar aquellos puntos positivos de su aprendizaje en beneficio de Jolomk'u.

No obstante su deseo firme de aferrarse a lo propio, aquellos ocho años ejercieron significativo influjo en aquel niño que se convertía en hombre prematuramente. A su edad ya había recorrido un buen trecho de las penalidades de este mundo y almacenaba un cúmulo de derrotas, sin conocer la cara sonriente de la vida (González, 119-20).

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*“[he] imagines another mode of becoming educated in and passing down Mayan modes of thought.”*

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Luin's battles with the education system pushed him to this exact moment of realization. He is able to redistribute the knowledge he has obtained, such as being literate in Spanish, mathematics and counting, but also push back against the narratives created about Mayans through his community's knowledge. He realizes that none of his ladino education was ever real or authentic to the core values he cherishes; instead the education he received was always "ajena" to him, or foreign. The foreign serves as a point of reference for him: what about his education becomes unfamiliar; what about the violence and disorientation are foreign? Through these questions, Luin comes to realize the power in an Indigenous sovereignty rooted in an intellectual autonomy. To be free from the confines of a colonial institution means to center and write back against the racist narratives that national discourse has pushed in order to interpolate the Indigenous body. In Luin's departure from the school system, he—alongside González—imagines another mode of becoming educated in and passing down Mayan modes of thought. His departure becomes revolutionary not in the act of deciding that the education system is not for him, but

in the *form* that he decides to reassess the role of education, creating a rupture from these colonial institutions. That is why Luin decides to embed his knowledge into his plan to create a Jolomk'u-centered education made for and by his community's core values and alternative epistemes. He signals to the reader that he never needed what any Guatemalan school could ever teach him. For him, to have a thriving intellectual community outside the State's parameters becomes necessary to liberate his community from the coloniality of power (carried out through the production of knowledge) that interpolates his community as "other." Luin takes his reflections one step further by carrying out his thoughts into practice, as can be seen towards the end of *La otra cara*.

The novel points towards collective action in order to reach an intellectual autonomy. As is narrated, schools were constructed in order to provide an education to the town's children; the construction of the schools allow for there to be a disbursement of services. The schools came to represent "un centro de desarrollo para la gente. Las sesiones se hacían en el gran salón de la escuela, en donde fueron instalados talleres, laboratorios, en donde la gente ponía en práctica y ejercitaba los conocimientos que adquirirían" (González, 240). The schools built represent how education is centralized in González's narrative of finding an intellectual autonomy from the colonial legacy of State schools. In this passage González begins to shape an alternate route that Mayans can take in their journey towards autonomy from the nation-state. Through Luin's plan and the community's willingness to manifest their visions, we, as the readers, note how education does in fact further the narrative of a collectivity. The collectivity that is fostered through this community-building points to how these efforts create organic foundations for a possible intellectual autonomy to be created and rooted in a Mayan collectivism. This intellectual autonomy rooted in a Mayan collectivism does not only challenge the traditional notions of what an education is—learning the fundamentals of language, producing writing skills, being socialized into the narratives of History, learning Mathematics, Science—, but rather this type of intellectual autonomy incorporates non-Western sources of knowledge, such as: the power of agriculture, Indigenous health/medicine, Indigenous cosmology, and communal organizing. For these reasons, Luin symbolizes what it means to challenge traditional forms of achieving an education, and he uses his core values to imagine a future where the knowledge and beliefs of his community are centered around the needs of Mayan folks. The future he is building alongside his community pairs their need for an intellectual autonomy from Guatemala's school system that has failed them with the recognition that they as Mayan folks also need to advance their needs for communal autonomy. Because as we know, their independence, self-reliance, and community-building are the only ways possible to survive the cycles of violence the

State has pushed and perpetuated. Through it all, *La otra cara* culminates with Luin and his community beginning to fight for agency in order to (re)think what Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy look like for them. Moreover, as Terry Eagleton puts it, "The artist uses certain means of production—the specialized techniques of his art—to transform the materials of language and experience into a determinate product" (Eagleton, 69), which will be used in order for communities like that of Jolomk'u to envision another future possible where they have agency and the choice to do what is best for their peoples. González, through Luin, uses discourse and language in order to portray the lived experiences that Mayans continue to live through, but he also uses them in order to create a material product that will help a Mayan reader, or any reader for that matter, build a foundation to begin to imagine another world that is not centered on the othering of Indigenous peoples.

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**MÓNICA OJEDA**

Páginas de espuma SL  
Spain, 2020

**LAS VOLADORAS**

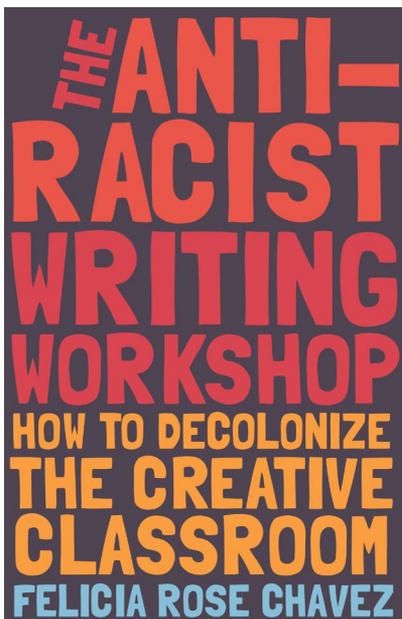
Drawing from Ecuadorian folklore, oral storytelling traditions, and Inca mythology, Mónica Ojeda delivers a short fiction debut that is as discerning as it is visceral, a hair-raising and deft collection that expands the possibilities of contemporary Latin American Gothic literature.

Unfolding in the mountains, volcanoes, and shrubland of the Andes, the stories in *Las voladoras* meticulously probe into the unspeakable and genuinely horrific: In the circular “Sangre coagulada,” the orphaned Ranita – a young girl harboring a fascination with blood – is sent to live with her grandmother, an old woman whom locals suspect to be a witch, while noise musician Bárbara fantasizes about cutting off her twin sister’s tongue during an underground music festival in the story “Slasher.” Others turn to the mystic to interpret the corporeally jarring, as is the case in the book’s title story, which employs the symbolism of Ecuadorian legends to

articulate a young woman’s coming of age, and in “Cabeza voladora,” where a college lecturer who is still reeling after discovering her teenage neighbor’s severed head becomes increasingly drawn to a cult of women who secretly convene at the scene of the crime.

Grappling with themes such as femicide, perversion, death and grief, incest, mutilation, and the occult, many of the tales found in *Las voladoras* are guaranteed to unsettle. But it is in these stories’ vulnerable explorations of violence and desire – in the unraveling of the characters’ morbid curiosities and futile hopes and starved compulsions – that the heart of Ojeda’s collection has its seat. Its consideration of humanity’s worst is shocking not because it is implausible, but because it is honest. Therein lies its true horror.

Reviewer: **Isabella Pilotta Gois** is a Venezuelan writer and recent graduate from the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied Comparative Literature.



**FELICIA ROSE CHAVEZ**

Haymarket Books  
USA, 2021

**THE ANTI-RACIST WRITING WORKSHOP**

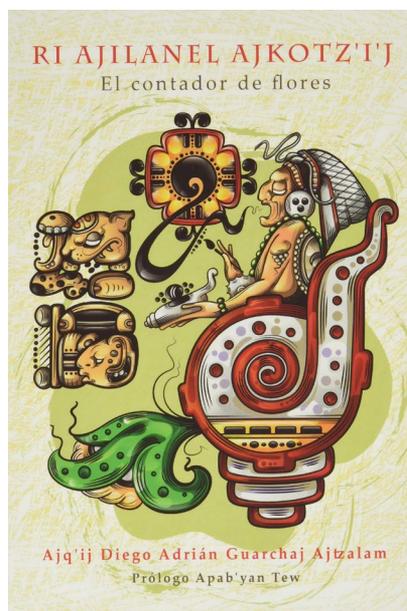
*The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom* is a groundbreaking approach to teaching a writing workshop by Colorado College educator Felicia Rose Chavez. This innovative book centers a new methodology for the writing workshop that aims to “deconstruct biases to achieve a cultural shift in perspective,” create “democratic learning spaces,” and recruit and nourish BIPOC students in order to give them their own agency.

Chavez, a first-generation college student, briefly attended Wellesley College before returning home to Albuquerque, New Mexico. In the interim between leaving Wellesley and starting DePaul University, she worked in Chicago as an AmeriCorps teacher and then as an educator for the Young Chicago Authors (YCA). In those early teaching experiences, the author learned a dialogue-based educational approach (later recognized formally as “culturally relevant teaching”) that laid the groundwork for the anti-racist writing workshop. Chavez

herself experienced the stultifying effects of traditional creative writing workshops based on dominance and control that centered “whiteness” (workshop leaders, canonical white authors, and predominantly white workshop participants). As a result, the anti-racist writing workshop model she developed upends this traditional approach by stressing craft, reading from a “living archive of multicultural texts,” and emphasizing a critical response-based model.

This paradigm-shifting book is a real game changer for writing workshops everywhere. Its value lies in democratizing the hallowed writers’ workshop where canonical authors read for the sake of emulation are replaced with an emphasis on craft (voice, imagery, characterization, and arrangement) and the integration of diverse authors. The book provides invaluable insight for educators, students, and writers alike but will invigorate emergent BIPOC writers, in particular.

Reviewer: **Marian Perales**, an editor and historian, received her M.A. in Chicana history from the Claremont Graduate University.



## DIEGO ADRIÁN GUARCHAJ AJTZALAM

Jade Publishing | USA, 2020

## RI AJILANEL AJKOTZ'I'J / EL CONTADOR DE FLORES

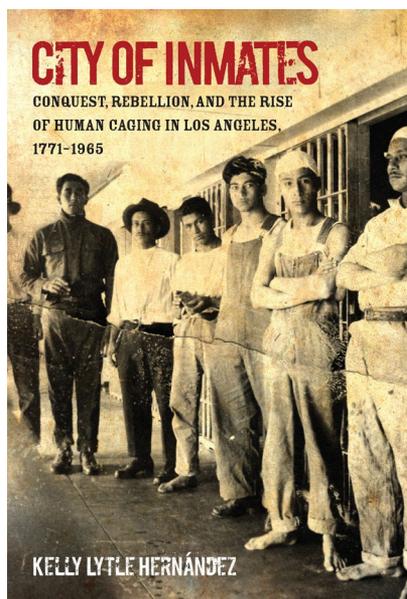
*Ri Ajilanel Ajkotz'i'j / El contador de flores* by the Ajq'ij Diego Adrián Guarchaj Ajtzalam, with a foreword by Apab'yan Tew, contains poems in [Mayan] K'iche' translated into Spanish by the linguist Oscar Ajkaj, grandson of tat Diego, with a beautiful cover designed by Walter Paz Joj.

*The Flower Counter* is a gorgeous book. What the ajq'ij Tat Te'k shows us in his poems is great sensitivity and wisdom. In them, we can see reflected the life and the K'iche' philosophy of one who "counts the days," a specialist of the [Maya] calendar. From the poem dedicated to the metate or his faithful companions, the dog and the cat, to the invocation of the ancestors, Heart of Heaven and Heart of Earth that take us to the living world of the Popol Wuj, which has been translated by our ajq'ij to various Mayan languages and Spanish. In each

poem, there is a wonderful rhythm that is understood to come from generations of singers and artists, from a civilization that never died out, it only had to transform.

The introduction by Apab'yan Tew is very emotional, and we thank him for being able to rescue that USB with such valuable material. I have worked with Apab'yan for many years. As a researcher, he is tireless and now, as a producer, he is admirable. I highly recommend this reading and also following up on the editorial work of Jade Publishing, which makes it possible to have these thoughts in hand.

Reviewer: **Dr. Yolotl González Torres** is a professor-researcher-emeritus at INAH. She is a specialist in Mesoamerican studies and a lifelong honorary president of the Mexican Society for the Study of Religions.



## KELLY LYTLE HERNÁNDEZ

The University of  
North Carolina Press  
USA, 2017

## CITY OF INMATES

UCLA history and African American studies professor and MacArthur Fellow Kelly Lytle Hernández's *City of Inmates* is a phenomenal book on Los Angeles's ugly history of incarceration spanning two centuries. In this pathbreaking study, the author investigates the carceral history of Angelenos from the city's inception in 1781. The city itself has been populated by diverse inhabitants, all of whom have been targeted populations at particular historical junctures.

Lytle Hernández shows how Los Angeles has become the "carceral capital of the world" that has been shaped by a longstanding history of settler colonialism. Beginning with the exclusion of Tongva-Gabrielinos in the early 19th century, colonists set out to build a "new, permanent racially reproductive and racially exclusive society." That model has continued from the 1820s to the present. Laws banning vagrancy and public drunkenness combined to reduce Indigenous populations. Jailed Gabrielinos were routinely auctioned to white Angelenos, resulting in several decades of forced servitude. Later, the Geary Act resulted in netting Chinese residents

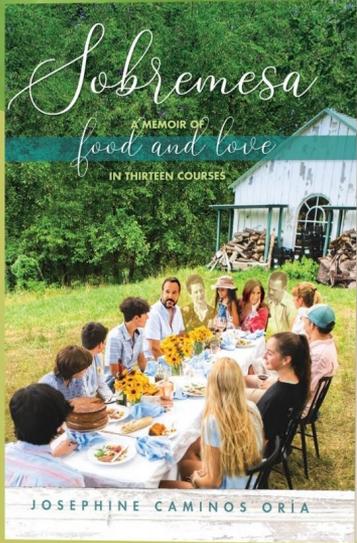
who were required to officially register their presence in the city. A final chapter implicates the LAPD in the fatal shootings and brutalization of Black men from the late 1920s-1950s.

Two insightful chapters illuminate Mexican/Mexican American experiences from the 1900s-1930s. Revolutionary Mexican journalist Ricardo Flores Magon agitated against Porfirio Díaz and was eventually imprisoned in LA under the Neutrality Act with the aid of the Mexican government. It is a fascinating chapter on the intersection of politics, censorship, and imprisonment. The author lays bare the caging of undocumented immigrants in a penetrating chapter on Mexicans in the 1920s-1930s. In sum, this outstanding book is a testament to the longstanding carceral history of BIPOC in Los Angeles. It is a painful reminder of the way that jails have historically served as a tool for excluding, erasing, and purging targeted populations from urban landscapes.

Reviewer: **Marian Perales**, an editor and historian, received her M.A. in Chicana history from the Claremont Graduate University.

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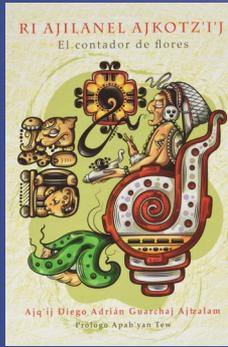
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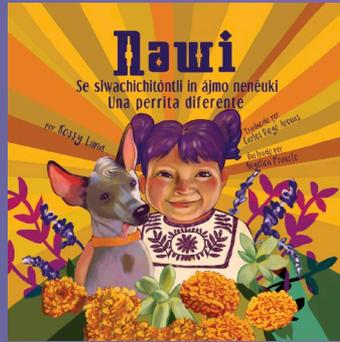
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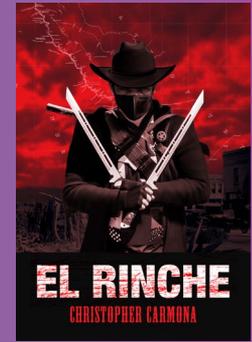
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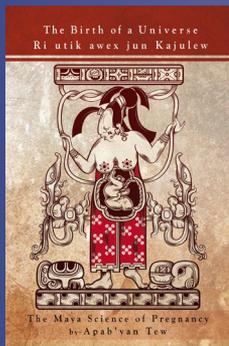
El contador de flores  
Ajq'ij Diego Adrián  
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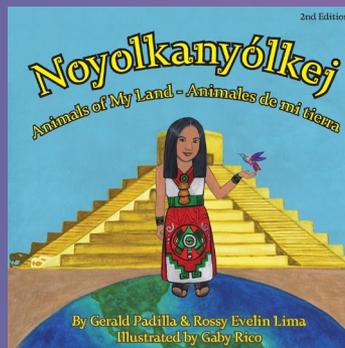
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Rossy Lima



El Rinche: Revolución  
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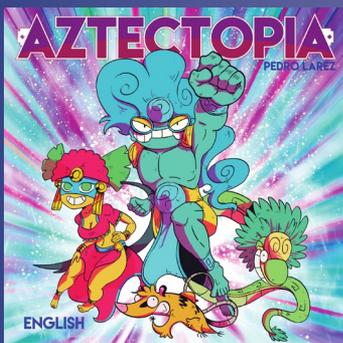
The Birth of a Universe  
Apab'yan Tew



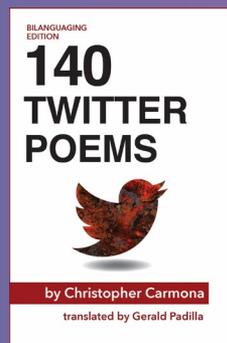
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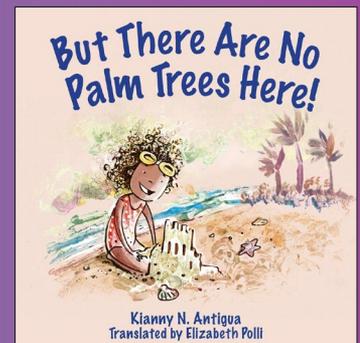
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