

VOL. XIV

2023

BORDER-LINES



University of Nevada, Reno

VOL. XIV

2023

BORDER-LINES

JOURNAL OF THE LATINO RESEARCH CENTER

BORDER-LINES JOURNAL

ISSN: 1945-8916

Volume XIV

2023

Border-Lines is an interdisciplinary and intersectional academic journal dedicated to the dissemination of research on Chicana/o-Latina/o cultural, political and social issues. *Border-Lines* is a refereed journal that seeks to publish scholarly articles drawn from a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, education, geography, human health, literary and cultural studies, political science, social work and sociology. Articles, poetry, prose and testimonials are accepted in English and in Spanish in APA style formatting.

Send complete manuscript and small author(s) biography (max. 200 words) including contact information and a title page with author(s) name, title, and affiliations, acknowledgments, abstract of 150 words or less and five keywords to:

Border-Lines
Latino Research Center / MS 434
University of Nevada, Reno
Reno, NV 89557
latinocenter@unr.edu

For more information visit www.unr.edu/latino-research-center/publications

BORDER-LINES EDITOR

Robert Gutierrez-Perez, PhD
California State University, San Marcos

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Nancy Acevedo-Gil, Ph.D.
*California State University,
San Bernardino*

Raisa Fernanda Alvarado, Ph.D.
Dixie State University

Luis Manuel Andrade, Ed.D.
Santa Monica College

Sergio G. Barrera, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin

Lorraine T. Benuto, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Reno

Christian A. Bracho, Ph.D.
University of La Verne

Resha Cardone, Ph.D.
Southern Connecticut State University

Nivea Castaneda, Ph.D.
Boise State University

Andreas E. Feldmann, Ph.D.
University of Illinois at Chicago

Stephanie Gomez, Ph.D.
Western Washington University

Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, Ph.D.
Seattle University

Lydia Huerta-Moreno, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Reno

Sergio F. Juárez, Ph.D.
California State University Fresno

Yoshira D. Macías Mejía, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Daniel Enrique Pérez, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Reno

Jafeth E. Sanchez, Ph.D.
University of Nevada, Reno

Paloma E. Villegas, Ph.D.
*California State University,
San Bernardino*

STAFF

Jafeth Sanchez, Ph.D.
Director of the Latino Research Center

Carolina Rocha Becerra
Assistant Editor

Matthew Minten
Journal Design and Layout

Cover by Julio Cesar Lopez Torres



INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE:

JOTERÍA ARTS, ACTIVISM, AND SCHOLARSHIP AS RESISTANCE

Robert Gutierrez-Perez 7

**EN/FLESH: EMBODYING QUEER OF COLOR THEORY / PERFORMING JOTERÍA
WORLDMAKING AND ABOLITION**

Michael Tristano Jr...... 15

SI DIOS TE HIZO ASÍ, POS ASÍ TE QUIERO MUCHO: TESTIMONIO EN PRACTICA

Ari Perez Montes, Ronald E. McNair Fellow 30

JOTX QUE NO PUDO SER

Xamuel Bañales 47

**ON THE WINGS OF A HUMMINGBIRD: MARCO CASTRO-BOJORQUEZ’S JOTERÍA
ACTIVISM**

Andrew Spieldenner and José A. Romero 55

**DESDE LA PREFERIA DE LA MILPA: TESTIMONIOS DE JOTERIA RURAL DE LOS
RANCHOS Y PUEBLOS DEL SUR DE MEXICO**

Luis Oswaldo Esparza 68

“QUEER NOVELA:” STORYTELLING ABOUT LATINIDAD, HEALING, AND RESISTANCE

María Cèlleri 89

QUEERING TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES LIKE A CHICANA/X FEMINIST

Pico del Hierro-Villa..... 106

IN THE TENDER DESERT OF JOTERÍA: REFLECTIONS OF ARTISTIC PRACTICE

Elaine Almeida..... 123

ARTIST STATEMENT—MÁSCARAS SERIES

Juan Antonio Trujillo..... 128

PLEASURE IN THE LAST GILDED AGE

Mario Alberto Obando..... 135

TOTOTLÁN/JOTOILÁN

Luis Esparza..... 144

INCENSE

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez 146

**APOLOGY TO MY SISTER WRITTEN AT THE DESK OF THE HOTEL ROOM IN YUMA THE
MORNING AFTER GETTING MY TEETH EXTRACTED**

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez 148

AMANECER SAN FRANCISCO

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez149

POEMA DE AMOR DE LA MUERTE AL HOMBRE

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez150

PESADILLAS PORNOGRÁFICAS

Pablo Ramirez.....154

BIOGRAPHIES

Introduction to the Special Issue: Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance

Robert Gutierrez-Perez

Part of me hates being an academic rather than an artist and activist. Part of me hates that this special issue on Jotería Studies is published with the financial support of a land grant institution. Part of me hates the games we have to play. In this introduction, I discuss this special issue on Jotería arts, activism, and scholarship to critically call into question the capitalist, White supremacist, cisheteropatriarchy operating within and with the blessing of academic institutions of higher learning. Indeed, these multifaceted and complex systems create in/hospitable arrivals for our Jotería communities. As I am working within Jotería studies, I am focused on discussing issues of difference, similarity, and sameness that erupt and interrupt when nonheteronormative *mestiza/o* performances of gender and sexuality enter into communication contexts that were not created for us to survive in. I do not use the word “survive” lightly as I am intentionally invoking Cherríe Moraga’s (2000) scholarship around loving in the war years, and although mainstream White LGBTQ culture has settled for marriage equality, for many Jotería interlocutors, including artists, activists, and scholars, the war years have never ended (Gutierrez-Perez & Andrade, 2018). For example, the massacre in 2016 at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, FL continues to emotionally, physically, and spiritually move Jotería bodies because the vast majority of the victims who were murdered were brown and black queer bodies (Gutierrez-Perez, 2021). In this pilgrimage/introduction, I stray yet stay focused on Jotería Studies as a purposeful utopian horizon in my writing to interrogate the socially constructed spaces and places that are made in/hospitable when we arrive into them, and further, I introduce the contents of this special issue to empower the reader as we navigate the politics of alliance-building in our everyday lives.

Searching for Meaning-Making Experiences

When I first entered my academic job, I was searching for experiences that would help me understand why I was here. Coming from a working-class and poor family, I still feel a deep yearning to understand why so many fell from the educational path, yet I am here writing on the page in a higher

education journal—nothing about my story says that I should be a scholar. In the mainstream, where is the story of the mixed-raced, queer Chicana who makes it out of the hood and into the hallways of academia? (Andrade & Gutierrez-Perez, 2019; Castaneda & Gutierrez-Perez, 2020). As an intercultural communication scholar focused on locating resistance and agency in the every lives of oppressed peoples through a performance studies lens, I participated in this special issue during a huge transition in my life as I moved from one academic institutional structure in Nevada to another in California. Experiences, relevancy, politics, involvement, and social oppression are about mediation, standing betwixt and between without breaking, and helping others make the journey (including myself). In this special issue, I wanted the volume itself to pose and answer central questions for the future of Jotería studies, art, and activism, and as the editor, it is my central goal to set the historical and political context of this issue as embedded in a field of power that is a fluid, complex, intersectional, and embodied.

In this special issue, the contributors were asked to submit work on the art, activism, and scholarship of Jotería. These studies answer the question Anzaldúa (2009) asks when theorizing queer/feminist alliances:

Why do we make alliances and participate in them? We are searching for powerful, meaning-making experiences. To make our lives relevant, to gain political knowledge, to give our lives a sense of involvement, to respond to social oppression and its debilitating effects. (141)

These debilitating effects of oppression are particularly heavy on women of color and transgender people of color, and it is through the theory of nepantla and nepantleras where I locate this special issue (Gutierrez-Perez, 2021). Nepantleras are the ultimate border crossers/dwellers (Anzaldúa, 2009). Their facultad for mediation, standing betwixt and between without breaking, and helping others make the journey safely is about belonging and questions of authenticity: a theory created in their flesh (Anzaldúa, 2009; Gutierrez-Perez, 2018; Keating, 2006). When I first entered academia, I was looking for meaning-making experiences, and I definitely received an experience; I just didn't know that betrayal, sabotage, and good old fashioned hate would be the catalyst that transformed me into the editor writing this introduction on the page right now. Academia made me hate myself, so why am I here? Why should we give this system anything of ourselves?

To Make Our Lives Relevant and To Gain Political Knowledge

In the opening essay, Michael Tristano Jr. discusses how as a sub-discipline, Jotería studies continues to catalogue and preserve personal, political, and academic experiences of Jotería bodies, narratives, and action. This work explores how Jotería praxis, shaped by theories of the flesh, has been used for survival and resilience in the past. Through an embodied approach to Jotería/queer of color/abolitionist worldmaking, Tristano explores how Jotería studies can simultaneously inform how Jotería bodies perform survival as well as provides a framework to perform abolition in our everyday encounters. With Tristano arguing for everyday performances of abolition as a laypoint for the foundation of large, structural change that many of us desire to accomplish, it felt important to shift to testimonio as another potentiality for Jotería Studies to make our lives relevant. Testimonio continues to be a methodology for Jotería studies to explore, develop, and deploy because it activates activism narratives, performs art in academic writing, and opens up political knowledge embodied by Jotería. In “Si dios te hizo así, pos así te quiero mucho: Testimonio en practica” by Ari Perez Montes, this testimonio uses “thick intersectionality” (Yep, 2013) and letter form loosely following Madison (1999), Ono (1997), and Calafell (2007) to examine the lived experiences of a queer trans Latinx person. In this offering, the author shares a personal open letter, and the act of viewing to a larger audience a letter that is addressed to their parents is part of how Jotería make our lives relevant as well as politically active. Exploring how trans identity coincides with Mexican culture and spirituality through thick intersectionality, this testimonio challenges understandings of English colonial language and writing in how we communicate our knowledge and lived experiences of being. Additionally, Xamuel Bañales’ creative nonfiction piece in this special issue adds this literary genre as one of many possibilities for Jotería Studies to explore deep affect and emotions. This work challenges traditionalist approaches to research and writing and makes an impact by utilizing writing as an everyday act of resistance. Jotería studies is dedicated to locating resistance and agency in the everyday lives of Jotería in all global communities, and Jotería Studies is unapologetic and steadfast in this pursuit—it is part of our utopian and queer approach to scholarship, art, and activism.

To Give Our Lives a Sense of Involvement

Lived experience, or embodied knowledge, is an opportunity for Jotería scholarship to address historical amnesia when it comes to the lives of Jotería. Addressing the gaps in historical memory, Andrew Spieldenner and José A. Romero trace the figure of el colibri (the hummingbird) across the oeuvre of Mexican documentarian and writer Marco Castro-Bojorquez's life and legacy. A hummingbird appears to float effortlessly even as its wings powerfully strain to carry it in its work in the harmony of nature. Organizing unapologetically as a queer, a feminist, a Mexican immigrant and joto, a *sidoso*, a lover of trans people and sex workers, Castro-Bojorquez produced work that invited a larger engagement than the current HIV and LGBT movements do today. In this scholarship, the authors examine three ways that Castro-Bojorquez's Jotería activism was practiced: health and dealing with trauma; the need and method to speak across movements and people; and ways to cultivate the future. Following this work that focuses on Jotería involvement in the past, Luis Esparza dives into the present experiences and contributions of subaltern queers of color that have been ignored by mainstream, eurocentric, white, colonialist, capitalist, centralists, universalists, separatists (MEWCCCUS). Using *pláticas* methodology, this project celebrates and honors resistance strategies of Jotería from rural places and spaces. The author's work with the contributors to this study constructs a list of resistance strategies that they tie directly to embodied experiences in relation to and against repressive colonial rhetorics. Throughout this special issue, scholars focus on addressing silence, remembering, and historical memory as opportunities for Jotería studies to create critical studies for and with our communities, and importantly, the scholarship from article to article in this special issue feature healing and resistance as a *telos* for Jotería art, activism, and scholarship.

To Respond to Social Oppression and Its Debilitating Effects

In "‘Queer Novela:’ Storytelling about *Latinidad*, Healing, and Resistance" by María Célleri, the author examines Raquel Ita's and Barbie Q's "Queer Novela" project—a YouTube web-series in which the two drag performers reenact stories sent to them by community members to reframe queer and trans Latinx representations in mainstream media. Based on a cultural analysis of their performance repertoire and an extensive interview with the performers, Célleri argues that drag and *Latinidad* are synonymous with each other within the logic of the Queer Novela project, and through storytelling, cultural performance, and resistance, the work they engage in is intentionally

political and grounded in both expanding and challenging a hegemonic and nationalistic framing of Latinidad. The author explores the following questions: What is Latinidad within the confines of ongoing heterosexist patriarchy? How does cultural drag reframe heterosexist and nationalist definitions of Latinidad? What is the role of storytelling in drag and Latinx culture and how does it function as a form of healing and resistance? In Pico del Hierro-Villa's "Queering Traditional Cultural Values like a Chicana/x Feminist," the author foregrounds Queer Chicana feminists as creating counter-movements and narratives to challenge hegemonic ideologies, like heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, that have affected the way Mexican/Chicanx culture has represented women. In this essay, a short genealogy and theoretical framework through Chela Sandoval's terms "oppositional consciousness" and "meta-ideologizing" is presented to show how Chicana feminists have created post-narratives through writing and art. Through these post-narratives, cultural iconographies, like La Virgen de Guadalupe and Malinche, function based on challenging colonial patriarchy and making room for liberation. With this, the author creates an artistic methodology to continue the work of queering cultural iconographies. Following this work is a brief essay by Elaine Almeida where the author reflects on their practice as a queer illustrator by considering the interconnections of Jotería and tenderness. Utilizing the language of both to express the desires and goals of their work, they begin to articulate a tender Jotería care and its potentiality for transformation and healing. The author traces the blossoming of this work at the nexus of American deserts and the survival of sexual trauma calling attention to this tender turn in their own practice and in Jotería studies.

Why Do We Make Alliances and Participate in Them?

With this special issue, I wanted to interpellate the reader into a fluid, complex, intersectional, and embodied field of power where both readers and the collaborators perform resistance together because shit is rough out here for Jotería. In order to undertake this interpellation, this special issue ends with artwork by Juan Antonio Trujillo titled "Mascaras" and poetry created by and for Jotería. As an example of Jotería art that centers the body, specifically the Jotería body. Trujillo draws in the viewer into an ephemeral world that is at once shadowy and bright, direct and indirect, and always beautiful. From these hauntingly distinct black and white greyscale images, we move to "Pleasure in the Last Gilded Age" by Mario Alberto Obando Jr., and these three poems center queer intimacies and desires oscillating from historical memory of

the neocolonial violences that transpired and linger in the isthmus of Central America to the cultural politics of life in the U.S. from a Central American diasporic perspective. Rendering the last stage of capitalism as “the last Gilded Age” the poems aim to capture queer Central American and Latinx pleasures, conversations and reflections as always already forged within the memories of ancestors who suffered through state-sanctioned violence. In “Tototlán/Jototlán” by Luis Esparza, the author utilizes a Spanish-only poem to create a poetic world for/by Jotería. In this work, I feel a utopian aesthetic that leans into the possibility of worlds created in process and being; a kind of present-focused activism that creates livable spaces in the here and now by drawing on the not here yet. This poem is followed by five poems by Oscar Gabriel Chaidez that evoke powerful imagery of Jotería life and experience, which is central to the embodied and intersectional approach that the editor feels is key to Jotería studies.

Finally, Pablo Ramirez in “Pesadillas Pornográficas” utilizes poetry as a way of theorizing Jotería. Through poetic reflection, Ramirez recalls specific moments of questioning sexuality, and by observing the mundane, everyday nature of compulsory heterosexuality, Ramirez positions queerness as covert and surreptitious. This exercise is undertaken as a way of linking queerness to Latinidad as central to Jotería critique. These collections of scholarship, art, and poetry turn Jotería studies towards the future and attempt to articulate how the embodiment of Jotería theories of the flesh manifest into everyday performances of resistance. Although Jotería studies enters published work in academia from particular journals and academic histories, this special issue dives across multiple disciplines to discuss power and resistance through Jotería scholarship, art, and activism. It is my greatest hope that the published works in this special issue will be an impetus for more work in Jotería studies.

References

- Andrade, L. M. & Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2019). On the specters of coloniality: A letter to Latina/o/x students journeying through the educational pipeline. In L. H. Hernández, D. I. Bowen, S. De Los Santos Upton, & M. R. Martinez (Eds.), *Latina/o/x communication studies: Theories, methods, and practice* (pp. 313-331). Lexington Books.
- Anzaldúa, G. (2009). *The Gloria Anzaldúa reader* (Keating, AnaLouise, Ed.). Duke University.
- Calafell, B. M. (2007). Mentoring and love: An open letter. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 7(4), 425-441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708607305123>
- Castaneda, N. & Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2020). Taking our dreams into hostile spaces: The role of communication in the maintenance of status quo stories. *Border-Lines: Journal of the Latino Research Center*, 12, 23-31.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2018). Monstrosity in everyday life: Nepantleras, theories in the flesh, and transformational politics. *The Popular Culture Studies Journal*, 6(2-3), 345-360.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. (2021). *Jotería communication studies: Narrating theories of resistance*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. M. & Andrade, L. (2018). Queer of color worldmaking: <Marriage> in the rhetorical archive and the embodied repertoire. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 38(1-2), 1-18.
- Keating, A. (2006). From borderlands and new mestizas to nepantlas and nepantleras: Anzaldúan theories for social change. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, 4, 5-16.
- Madison, D. S. (1999). Performing theory/embodied writing. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19(2), 107-124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939909366254>
- Moraga, C. (2000). *Loving in the war years: Lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (2nd ed.). South End Press.
- Ono, K. A. (1997). A letter/essay I've been longing to write in my personal/academic voice. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 114-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319709374566>

- Yep, G. A. (2013). Queering/quaring/kauering/crippin'/transing "other bodies" in Intercultural Communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(2), 118–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2013.777087>

En/flesh: Embodying Queer of Color Theory / Performing Jotería Worldmaking and Abolition

Michael Tristano Jr

Abstract:

As a sub-discipline, Jotería studies continues to catalogue and preserve personal, political, and academic experiences of Jotería bodies, narratives, and action. Indeed, there has been great explorations on how Jotería praxis, shaped by theories of the flesh, has been used for survival and resilience in the past. This essay, however, turns Jotería studies towards the future and attempts to articulate how the embodiment of Jotería theories of the flesh manifest into everyday performances of resistance. More specifically, performances of resistance which work towards abolitionist politics and worldmaking. Through an embodied approach to Jotería/queer of color/abolitionist worldmaking, this manuscript explores how Jotería studies can simultaneously inform how Jotería bodies perform survival as well as provides a framework to perform abolition in our everyday encounters. I argue that everyday performances of abolition lay the foundation for large, structural change many of us desire to accomplish.

Keywords: Abolition, Jotería, narrative, performance, queer of color

In. Out. In. Exhale.

The reverberating hums from the equipment mix with the soft, lo-fi beats that are playing in the background. A little mix to set the mood, you could call it.

In. Out. And in again. Exhale.

The repeated motion of penetration is a flurry of pain and pleasure that shoots through my body. “Breathe,” I think to myself. “Enjoy it while it lasts.” I enjoy a little pain mixed with my pleasure.

In. Out. Innnnnn. Exhale.

“That last one was Spicy,” I say softly. I smile. An almost deviant smile. “Oh yeah,” they say matter-of-factly. “Back there can be a bit tricky. It’s worth it though. And if you need a break, just let me know,” they say warmly.

I feel care from them in this moment. The way they said their words filled with affection, the way they are supporting my body to hold it in the optimal position, and the of course the way the words of “and if you need a break, just let me know,” confirm their commitment to making this a pleasurable experience for both of us. I feel seen and heard but mostly I feel empowered by the autonomy given to me in this encounter.

In. Outoutoutttow ow. In. Exhale.

I start to think about the autonomy of bodies in this moment. Where and when each of us is empowered to be how we want, to make the relationships that we wish to have, and to create communities that operate in ways we most would like the world to look like. I smile and sigh at the same time. The sensations running through my body: pleasure and pain, loss and gain, hope and doubt all collide in my body.

In. Out. And in once more. Exhale.

I am laying on my back and as I exhale, I slowly turn my head towards my right-side shoulder. I lock eyes with them as they go back in again. “I appreciate you being so sensitive, kind, and in tune to my body during this,” I say. They smile. I watch them as they attend so carefully to their craft; they are hovered over my body making sure to hug every curve and to keep the placement quite precise. I move my gaze to my right arm and watch as ink

appears onto my flesh like magic. I can hear and see the needle that pierces it rapidly and yet it still feels like the ink appearing on my body comes from an other-worldly place. I watch as it slowly appears and once again, I think about the autonomy my queer Brown body experiences in this moment. With the help of another human I am in community with, I have the ability to change my body. To mark my flesh with letters, symbols, and décor of my choosing. Skin is not solely an object; skin can record our personal biographies, is managed by subjects, contains multiple histories and not yet realized futures, and intelligible by others to create particular meanings for particular bodies (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001). Theorizing about progenic Auschwitz tattoos, Brouwer and Horwitz (2015) describe tattoos as “writing on the body” (p. 553) and suggests they move through space to generate rhetorical moments for tattoo owners and onlookers to co-create knowledges, meanings, and memories. Tattooing moves beyond the cosmetic, or even the symbolic. It is a process that alters flesh and offers potentials to alter the world. I am seeing with my own eyes how to build the Brown, queer body I want to inhabit; adorning my skin with a blueprint for a different world.

In. Out. And-before-they-can-put-the-needle-back-into-my-arm-again-I—
Exhale.

“I taught Muñoz in class today,” I say. They nod gently. We have discussed Muñoz and his work before. His work is present in the tattoo shop. I continue: “I love reading him in my undergraduate classes. I always learn so much from students who encounter him for the first time. I can always see the ones that really need him.” I take a deep breath. And one more for good measure. “The piece you are working on right now...on my arm,” I stop mid-sentence and breathe in one more time. “He’s the one who first led me towards Muñoz’s work. This piece, a sprawling queer desert, it is a tribute to him. He loved the desert; it is where he made his home. I actually hate the desert. But I can think of no better way to honor him on my body. I love him. I owe him everything.”

The person tattooing me shuts off the machine. Puts down the needle and lays a hand on mine. And we sit listening to the soft music for a moment. “Do you need a break?” they ask? “No,” I say. “I like a bit of pain with my pleasure.”

The reverberating hum of the machine begins once again.

In. Out. In. Exhale.

The opening that directly precedes this section highlights the importance of cataloguing and performing narratives as an onto-epistemological project (Peterson & Langellier, 2006). In other words, narratives, on the one hand, help humans organize and make sense of the world they inhabit. On the other hand, however, performing narratives, or narrating, allows for the possibility of other narratives to be created and, eventually, performed. In this way, narratives are an onto-epistemological endeavor that allow for scholars, artists, and community members to (re)narrate the world around them. For those of us invested in Jotería arts, activism, and scholarship, we have seen the utility of narrative (performance) for decades. For instance, *Joto*, roughly translated from Spanish as “queer” or “faggot,” as a homophobic slur has been used to narrate the stories of Brown, queer bodies in disparaging ways for decades. However, Jotería studies has reappropriated the word *joto* and is now a site of critical inquiry that centers non-normative gender and sexual identities that intersect with Latinx subjectivities in order to challenge (or re-narrate) master narratives domination and illuminate hegemonic structures of power (Gutierrez-Perez, 2021; Pérez, 2014). It is important to note, not all narratives are performed nor are all performances narratives. However, in this essay, I understand the narrative(s) I share as performed on the page. Indeed, while the words are static on the page, “every word you read enacts, performs, and re-performs” meaning, knowledge, and culture of history and society (Gutierrez-Perez, 2021, p. 2).

Indeed, while narrative theory and performance has been institutionalized and prominent in academic spaces and discourses, the question becomes: what narratives are included in narrative analyses? Those of us working under the umbrella of Jotería studies (as well as our colleagues and comrades in Black studies, Asian American studies, and disability studies to name a few) have longed challenged what narratives have been historically valued by the academy (Roque Ramírez, 2013). Jotería narratives, for instance, not only provide perspective on underrepresented groups (e.g. Brown, queer folks), but actually become a repertoire of evidence by how marginalized people survive in the world that creates the material conditions that enacts multiple forms of violence on their bodies. In his monograph, *Jotería Communication Studies: Narrating Theories of Resistance*, Robert Gutierrez-Perez (2021) argues Jotería narratives are theory turned praxis for resisting multiple forms oppression, challenge master narratives of power and control, and become a blueprint for other *jotos* to survive as well. I quote Gutierrez-Perez at length to demonstrate the power of Jotería narratives:

Collecting and remembering the historical narratives of queer of color bodies means coming to terms with the fact that this community is under attack but is powerful, and the situational and material conditions of this community are ordered by intersectional structures of power (p. 26).

Put differently, power is a complex system that creates less livable lives for those who experience multiple forms of oppression. Power is clever in this way. However, by collecting and studying the mundane narratives of jotos, we can examine how we navigate the complicated landscape of power every day. Jotos, then, are clever in this way. Which is, of course, is why Gutierrez-Perez aptly names these narratives as forms of praxis. He argues, through the everyday power of language, like *chisme*, for example, Jotos perform decolonial ways of living and knowing. We learn from the stories of others as we ourselves continue to navigate the same violent structures.

In. Out. In. Exhale.

I begin to tell my friend who is tattooing me about a student in one of my classes this semester. He's a non-traditional¹, queer student of color. He is as smart as a whip. This semester, both in class and through more private conversations in my office, he is opened up about some of the struggles he is facing—in his familial home, his place of work, and, of course, in this particular educational institution. We talk and I provide the support that I can. It is most likely not enough but it is what I have the capability to give to him for the moment. I was so excited to for class today, I tell my friend. Because I wanted to hear what this student had to say about Muñoz's work; Muñoz's way of writing, the objects of his analysis, and the way he makes transformative performances of sexuality and race dance off of the page. In. Out. A-sharp!-In. Exhale.

"He was absent today, though," I say in a hushed toned. I think all of the reasons he might have not been able to attend class. How the structures of the world he lives in make it difficult for him to get where he needs to be, to do what he needs to do, and to live his life like he wants to live it. His absence, while silent, was ringing in my ears the entire class period.

¹ By non-traditional, I am referring to the student's age, which is older than the normative age of college students. Traditionally defined as a person over the age of 25 (Tilley, 2014).

In. Out. In. I feel the needle's presence in/on my flesh. Exhale

The word absent is a hard word. Not a difficult word, per say. But one that is bleak or brutal. Something or someone who is absent implies a need, desire, or precedent for something or someone be there. In other words, an absent implies there is something or someone missing. And I know for me, absence is almost always accompanied with a sense of despair. Or what Muñoz (1999) classifies as melancholia. Writing specifically about queer communities of color and challenging the problematic assumptions of popular white, queer theory, Muñoz describes melancholia as a “structure of feeling” (p. 74) for queers of color; it is a part of our everyday lives. Theorizing melancholia as not always negative or counterproductive, Muñoz goes on to argue melancholia indicates the need for different activist gestures. “Rather, [melancholia] is a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names—and in our names” (p. 74). Put differently, if the current structures make it possible for a body to be absent (e.g. poverty, incarceration, or death), then it is quite imperative that we begin to reimagine what is possible for the present.

In. Out. IN. Exhale.

The concepts of presence and absence swirls around in mind as the needle continues to pierce my skin. Even though I was living through it, the formalized study of queer of color theory, and particularly Muñozian thought, was absent from my life for decades. It is now present in every facet of my life; I embody it when I walk up to the front of a classroom or when I enter a tattoo shop. The presence of my mentor, who led me to this body of theory, is no longer physically here. The structures of the world took him from us far too early. So, I ventured here, to get ink put into my body to have the physical manifestation of my mentor's presence with me from now on. And, most pressingly tonight, I think about the absence of my student in class. And I wonder how I can create something in the present to prevent his absence from spaces in the future. Siiigh-in. Out. In. Exhale.

Critical to my conceptualization of narrative analysis, and Jotoría narratives more specifically, is the practice of performative writing. Calafell (2007) explicates performative writing is an embodied approached to writing that asks the reader to feel the text. She argues performative writing is an important strategy to evoke a felt sense of personal and cultural memory. In

this way, performative writing compels the author to write from/through the body. Our bodies carry the stories we feel. As we reengage the stories we carry, we recall how our flesh felt in the moment. Therefore, I draw heavily on women of color feminisms and the ideas found in theories in the flesh. As Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) write, “a theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grow up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (p. 19). Anzaldúa (2002) further elaborates, theory in the flesh:

comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting all your body and decoding its symptoms...Attention is multileveled and includes your surroundings, bodily sensations and responses, intuitive takes, emotional reactions to other people and theirs to yours and, most important, the images your imagination creates—images connecting all tiers of information and their data. Breaking out of your mental and emotional prison and deepening the range of perception enables you to link inner reflection and vision—the mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, and subtle bodily awareness—with social political action and lived experience to generate subversive knowledge (p. 542).

Put another way, performative writing allows the personal to become political and displays the political as personal (Pelias, 2005). Performative writing begs the author to describe how to the structures of the power (the political) literally feels through the flesh (the personal). Indeed, as jotos, our bodies are living, breathing legacies of colonialism, racism, homophobia, and cis-heterosexism (Hames-García, 2014).

Performative writing becomes one important way scholars, particularly marginalized scholars, translate the personal, felt sense of theories in the flesh creatively onto the page (Johnson, 2001). I utilize performative writing, rooted in theory in the flesh, to enhance the narrative account’s decolonial and a liberatory potential (Gutierrez-Perez, 2021). In this essay, I utilize performative writing, narrative, and theories of the flesh in tandem. While overlapping, I use these distinct methodologies to highlight the multifaced way performance scholarship can look. The narrative(s) that I share function as way to catalogue my own personal history and engagements with society. The method of sharing my narratives through performative writing allows me to perform my narratives on the page in particular way so that they may evoke particular thoughts, feelings, and aesthetics to the reader. Finally, I use theories of the flesh to center the political nature of Brown, queer bodies

and testimonies. In addition, theories of flesh allow me to work through the literal act of altering my flesh through the process of tattooing. Combined, these theories and methods become a way to highlight how vast ideological iterations of power structures (e.g. coloniality, cis-heterosexism, or white supremacy) can be navigated through with a subtle touch on the side from another queer of color, shared movement on the dance floor of a queer of color nightlife space, or a subtle gaze shared between people during the process of tattooing. Indeed, in this way, narratives become forms of praxis for survival.

In. Out. In. Exhale.

I continue to examine the needle as it produces a pattern onto my skin. I watch it form something that was not there an hour ago. The needle, ink, my body, and the skilled hand of the artist/my friend are co-creating a presence that was not there before. On a very basic level, I get tattooed to make my body feel like my own. To be empowered by the autonomy I have to create the body I want to live in. This new tattoo, or any of the others that adorn my body, is a presence to make the world a more livable place for me. I think to myself, perhaps that sounds too grandiose, hopeful, or just simply cheesy—

—In! Out! In! Exhale!

I stop myself before I can finish the sentence in my head. I recognize I am attempting to downplay what the process of tattooing means to me because I have been conditioned to think, behave, and theorize in colonial ways of being that maintain and reify harmful and violent ideological systems of power. Colonial onto-epistemological projects would suggest what I know through my body and the process of altering my body are not legitimate forms of knowledge production. I let the feelings of survival and resilience I experience through the ink on my body run through my mind, down my arm, and watch them meet the needle currently piercing my flesh. This is a moment of resilience that queer of color theory and Jotería art, activism, and scholarship has prepared me for. It catches me and reminds me to push back against master narratives of power and oppression. To push back *and* to create a different presence. In this case, a desert landscape on my arm. I feel empowered. I feel...good!

In. Out. In. Exhale e e e-

“-everything ok?” my friend tattooing me asks? I nod and send an affirming word. I am unable to determine how much time has passed since we

last spoke. But they pick up the conversation from where we last left off. “So what will you do?” they ask. Puzzled, I ask them to clarify the subject of their question. “When the student comes back to class—what will you do?”

In. Out. In....exhale.

It seems like a simple question. On the surface. Some instructors might say they will mark down his participation grade. Maybe others might deliver a verbal warning towards him about the flounders of not coming to class. Perhaps most would say they would simply do nothing. “I sent him an email checking in with him. I will continue to follow up if I do not hear from him. And if and when he returns to class, I will respond with more support and care,” I say. Here, again, I recognize the ways in which structures of power create the student’s material reality. I recall he recently moved out of his given parent’s home for safety and has been fighting with university housing. I recall he picked up a second job to make sure he has food to eat. I recall that everything he is dealing with takes a massive toll on one’s physical and emotional health. “I want to model a different structure in which we could all live in,” I say. I want to materialize a structure, one that has a presence that can be felt by both myself and the student. One that does not respond to ‘wrong doing’ with punishment. In the absence of punishment, we can chart a presence not yet known.

I turn, finally, towards the idea of abolition. More specifically, abolition, as a direction of queer of color theory and Jotería art, activism, and scholarship can move towards. Indeed, queer of color theory and Jotería studies have provided a framework for how narratives catalogue survival for queers of color. They push back on master narratives and provide praxis for those of us still living. I argue, however, as an onto-epistemological approach, queer of color and Jotería narratives hold the potential to move us towards not only survival but provide a blueprint for a world in which an abolitionist politic can thrive. By abolition, I mean the eradication of systems of surveillance and punishment including, but not necessarily limited to, police forces, prisons, and borders. For those of us that subscribe to an abolitionist politic, we recognize that the aforementioned systems do not make us feel safe and simultaneously perpetuate inequality, violence, and harm (Davis, 2003). The emphasis on systems is critical to abolitionist thinking, as it allows us to work towards the long-term goal of dismantling police departments, the prison industrial complex (PIC), and the economic and political systems that

maintain them. As Critical Resistance (2020), an organization that works to build a mass movement to dismantle the PIC, reminds us, “Abolition isn’t just about getting rid of buildings full of cages. It’s also undoing the society we live in because the PIC both feeds on and maintains oppression and inequalities through punishment, violence, and controls millions of people. Because the PIC is not an isolated system, abolition is a broad strategy” (p. 6). Abolition requires a radical challenge to society (Kaba & Ritchie, 2022). Indeed, it begs the question: in the absence of our current society, what is it that we want to build instead? And how do we do so?

I believe one approach to addressing the preceding questions is utilizing lessons that Jotería studies gives to us. It is important to note, that the move towards abolition for queer of color theory and Jotería art, activism, and scholarship should be a logical maneuver, as border patrol, detention centers, and inhumane retaliation for those that move across borders have plagued our communities for many years. And yet, if you are anything like me, thinking about the process of abolition is daunting and difficult. The large-scale structural change we would need to organize seems almost impossible to realize in most of our lifetimes. And perhaps, most notably, the question many of us grapple with is what would a world without police or prisons look like?

I turn here, then, to leading abolitionist thinker and organizer, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2018), and quote her at length when she says:

Abolition is not absence, it is presence. What the world will become already exists in fragments and pieces, experiments and possibilities. So those who feel in their gut deep anxiety that abolition means knock it all down, scorch the earth and start something new, let that go. Abolition is building the future from the present, in all of the ways we can (para. 2).

Wilson Gilmore’s words resonant particularly well with the narrative present in this essay, specifically, and in queer of color narratives more broadly. For years, we have been piecing together our presents together as jotos with any pieces we can find: stools at the bar, reading circles, and each other’s bodies. The piecing together of the present we have already been doing as queers of color can propel us into piecing together a future. A future in which abolition is made more possible. Abolitionist scholar and lawyer Sarah Lambie (2021) argues the first step to practicing everyday abolition is to undo carcel logics found in everyday contexts. To return to the example of the student who was absent in my class, carcel logics would suggest a punitive response for his

misbehavior. Yet queer of color sensibilities, allow me to see and understand more clearly how power structures were creating the material conditions that made it impossible for him to come to class that day. And in responding with care, rather than punishment, I practiced an abolitionist politic in my every day.

There is a clear connection between studying Jotería and queer of color narratives of the past as resilience and utilizing those lessons to propel us into an abolitionist future. For instance, in his book, *Brown Trans Figurations: Rethinking Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Chicana/Latina Studies*, Francisco J. Galarte (2021) considers the contexts in which Brown, trans narratives are shared, positioned, and understood. He works towards a theory of gender, sexuality, and race that is performed outside the normative binary of gender through cataloguing Brown, trans narratives across several decades. I put Galarte's work in conversation with Bey and Goldberg (2022) who argue that gender, in and of itself, is a carcel system. They argue, the PIC not only disproportionately harms gender, sexual, and racial minorities at higher rates, the colonial gender binary and sexual structures we participate in are prisons themselves. Bey and Goldberg theorize a world in which an end to policing and prisons coincides with an end to gender and sexuality. I argue, the lived, everyday Brown trans narratives Galarte shares provides potential blueprints for a genderless, abolitionist futures. Jotería studies has been collecting narratives of our mundane (joto) lives and performances for years, I argue, they are not only histories of survival and resilience, they also hold the potential for abolitionist futures. Joto narratives empower me to remake my everyday into the abolitionist futures I want to live in. If we are to remove carcel logics from our everyday, we will have a large societal absence to fill (Critical Resistance, 2020). An absence, I argue, that can be filled with queer of color and Jotería worldmaking that moves us closer to a large, structural change. Queer of color worldmaking refers to the ways in which queers of color create spatial and temporal strategies for themselves and their communities as tactic gestures of resistance and possibilities of new subjectivities (Gutierrez-Perez & Andrade, 2018). Further, queer of color worldmaking gets enacted through our relational and/or coalitional performances of everyday interactions; it is through the performances of our daily lives, our bodies, and our relationships that queer of color worldmaking comes to materialize. Indeed, to return to Muñoz (2009), the mundane acts we practice, as queers of color, connect to modes of critique and political resistance. These queer of color/Jotería worldmaking and abolitionist practices in the mundane move us closer to large-scale social change many of us desire. In this way, I understand performance to be essential

for an abolitionist politic; we must perform the future we want to see. Radical creativity and imagination are required. And jotos have been showing us how to do so for centuries. From our classrooms, to performances of gender, or to even the way we care for partners and community members, our worldmaking practices can lead us to abolitionist futures.

In. Out. In. Exhale.

“We’re almost done,” they say. My mind is still swirling as I work betwix the presences and absences I am feeling. My student. Queer of color theory. The classroom. My mentor. And, of course, the now completed ink landscape on my arm. “It looks really fucking rad,” I say to my friend tattooing me. “He would love this tribute.” The melancholia I feel as I say those last words are tremendous. “What a life, what a loss,” I say. And yet, if possible, the potentialities I have mulled over in my head and with my friend during this session has energized me for creating an abolitionist future.

In. Outttt. In. Exhale

My mentor was an abolitionist. I can recall several conversations we had about the (im)possibilities of abolition. We once both happen to attend a speaker on campus who delivered a spectacular lecture about abolition. The speaker shared about applying abolitionist principals in a housing context. She argued that providing more social services works towards abolitionist goals and reduces the number of unhoused people simultaneously². Afterward, we agreed to go have a drink together and discuss our thoughts with one another. We grappled with the idea. Posing questions to another, winding down roads of possibility that seemed unrealistic, and letting ourselves be honest with each other about why abolition might make us feel scared. It was an important conversation. One that helped me move towards my own abolitionist politic. He was always good for a difficult but rich conversation. Such conversations are always better with a white wine. I learned that from him.

In. Out. And in final time. Exhale.

I turn to my arm and see the finish product. This tattoo is a presence. A

² To read more about the intersection of housing policy and abolition see Sophie House and Krystle Okafor (2020), *Under One Roof: Building an Abolitionist Approach to Housing*.

presence of a person, theory, a landscape, and a politic. The tattoo's presence is only made possible by what is absent. And as I begin to get up and move my body after laying still for a good chunk of time, I feel the Jotería narratives present in this tattoo shop. Not only mine but those who were there before me and those will come after me. The narratives of my students, my community, and my chosen family. I feel their presence and let them propel me into a future which still needs to be built.

As I make my way towards the exit, I let the low-fi beats wash over me. I want to take this energy of possibility with me. I pay my friend for the session and I hand them my copy *This Bridge Called My Back*; they have not read it before and I told them they could borrow it. "It's a rad read," I say to them. I look forward to meeting them next week for a drink to discuss the book and whatever else we might find relevant. I tell them my students just read a few selections out of the book and I mention specifically the non-traditional, queer student of color was present the days we discussed the material. "He had some really interesting comments about it," I say. I give them a hug goodbye. I throw on my coat, hobble down the slippery stairs outside of the shop, and waddle my way back to my car. I sit for a moment a briefly touch my arm. Even through my coat and the protective wrap I can still feel the hit from the work I just had done. I pull out my phone and send my student an email. To let them know, once more, that when they are willing and able to communicate with me, I will happily go over the Muñoz reading we went over in class today. I think to myself, "the battle wages on."

References

- Ahmed, S. & Stacey, J. (2001). *Thinking through the skin*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2002). Now let us shift...the path of *conocimiento*...inner work, public acts. In G. E. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (Eds.), *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation*. (pp. 540-578). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bey, M. & Goldberg, J. A. (2022). Queer as in abolition now! *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 28(2), 159-163. doi: 10.1215/10642684-9608091
- Brouwer, D. C. & Horwitz, L. D. (2015). The cultural politics of progenic Auschwitz tattoos: 157622, A-15510, 4559, ... *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 101(3). doi: 10.1080/00335630.2015.1056748
- Calafell, B. M. (2007). *Latina/o communication studies: Theorizing performance*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Critical Resistance. (2020). Our communities, our solutions: An organizer's toolkit for developing campaigns to abolish policing. *Critical Resistance*. Retrieved September 1, 2022, from https://criticalresistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CR_Abolish-Policing-Toolkit_2020.pdf
- Davis, A. (2003). *Are prisons obsolete?* Toronto, CA: Seven Stories Press.
- Galarte, F. J. (2021). *Brown trans figurations: Rethinking race, gender, and sexuality in Chicana/Latina studies*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. (2021). *Jotería communication studies: Narrating theories of resistance*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. & Andrade, L. (2018). Queer of color worldmaking: <marriage> in the rhetorical archive and the embodied repertoire. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 38(1-2), 1-18. doi: 10.1080/10462937.2018.1435130
- Hames-García, M. (2014). Jotería studies, or the political is personal. *Atzlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 39(1), 135-142.
- House, S. & Okafor, K. (2020) Under one roof: Building an abolitionist approach to housing justice. *Journal of Legislation & Public Policy Quorum*.
- Johnson, E. P. (2001). "Quare" studies or (almost) everything I know about queer studies I learned from my grandmother. *Text and Performance*

- Quarterly*, 21(1), 1-25. doi: 10.1080/10462930128119
- Kaba, R. & Ritchie, A. J. (2022). *No more police: A case for abolition*. New York, NY: The New Press.
- Lamble, S. (2021). *Abolishing the police: An illustrated introduction*. London, UK: Dog Section Press.
- Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (2015). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. (4th ed.). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Muñoz, J. E. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of color and the performance of politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. (2009). *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*. New York: NY: University Press.
- Pérez, D. E. (2014). Jotería epistemologies: Mapping a research agenda, unearthing a lost heritage, and building “queer Atzlán.” *Atzlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 39(1), 143-154.
- Pelias, R. J. (2005). Performative writing as scholarship: An apology, an argument, an anecdote. *Cultural Studies<->Critical Methodologies*, 5(4), 415-424. doi: 10.1177/1532708605279694
- Peterson, E. E. & Langellier, K. M. (2006). The performance turn in narrative studies. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 173-180. doi:10.1075
- Roque Ramírez, H. N. (2013). Recording a queer community: An interview with Horacio N. Roque Ramírez. In T. Barnett & C. A. Noriega, 132-152. *Oral history and communities of color* (pp. 132-152). Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center Press.
- Tilley, B. P. (2014). What makes a student non-traditional? A comparison of students over and under age 25 in online, accelerated psychology courses. *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 13(2), 95-106. doi: 10.2304/plat.2014.13.2.95
- Wilson Gilmore, R. (2018). Making abolition geography in California’s central valley. *The Funambulist*. <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/21-space-activism/interview-making-abolition-geography-california-central-valley-ruth-wilson-gilmore>

Si dios te hizo así, pos así te quiero mucho: Testimonio en practica

Ari Perez Montes, Ronald E. McNair Fellow

Abstract

This *testimonio* uses “thick intersectionality” (Yep, 2013) and letter form, loosely following Madison (1999), Ono (1997), and Calafell (2007) to examine my personal lived experience as a queer trans Latinx person and offer it for viewing to a larger audience. This is a vulnerable personal open letter addressed to my parents with things I would like to tell them, while also exploring how my trans identity coincides with my Mexican culture and spirituality through thick intersectionality. This *testimonio* also challenges our understanding of English colonial language and writing in how we communicate our knowledge and lived experiences of /being/.

Keywords: transgender; Latinx; spirituality; health; testimonio

“Often we demand of the American novel to be cohesive, a monolithic statement of a generation. But having grown up post 9/11, cohesion was not part of my generation’s imagination, nor our language, or our self-identity. And I felt if I were to write my version of an American novel, it would have to look more like fragmentation.”

Ocean Vuong (2019)

“There’s a structure in academia that is problematic because the language (original voice) your training tells you that there is no place for your original voice. The public institutions are riddled with bureaucracy in a way that makes it very difficult to just be creative, you know?”

Cherrie Moraga (2020)

“Ultimately does language matter? Is it worth it to speak your mind and your truth in fiction, or otherwise, if an audience, even if it is an audience of one, is never promised? Does it matter?”

Ocean Vuong (2019)

Mami y papi,

Cuando escribo en mis cuadernos siempre me pregunto:

¿Para quién es?

¿Con quién estoy hablando?

¿Es para mí?

Probablemente.

¿Es para Dios?

Es otra posibilidad.

Es para ustedes?

Otra posibilidad.

Y a lo mejor escribo para mi, o para dios, o para ustedes. A veces una de estas posibilidades es más probable que otras. Pero la que creo más frecuente es que escribo en mis cuadernos para ustedes, y todo lo que no les puedo contar o comunicar bien en español. Una parte de mí escribe en mis cuadernos para reconciliar todo lo que no les dije en mi juventud y cosas que no les puedo contar ahora para no preocupar los.

Esto es para ustedes,

y para mi,

y para dios,

y para otras queer/trans personas.

As an open and out queer non-binary trans masc person, I am in this eternal state of vulnerability in the spaces I occupy. It is almost like that saying all queer/trans people know: “You never stop coming out.” Martinez (2019) states, “To be vulnerable is to be exposed. Naked. Raw. Authentic. Intimate” (p. 355). To be a queer/trans person means to never stop coming out. To be queer/trans means to /always/ being in a state of intimate vulnerability. Being in academia now continues to place me in another state of vulnerability: being Latinx in a predominantly white institution. My identities affect the spaces I occupy and my positionality to the issues I research.

This proximity to whiteness also affects how I occupy these spaces. Lui (2017) states when interests of a power-governor (e.g., institutions)

intersect with the interests of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) and White women, only some privileges are granted to certain individuals. Proxy privilege occurs for White women or BIPOC in relation to their physical proximity to a White person, more specifically a White man, in specific spaces and places (Lui, 2017). While my proximity to whiteness changes in the physical spaces I occupy I must also look at how my transness shifts in these spaces. I mentioned that queer/trans people never stop coming out. Daily in academia, I am forced to come out when I share my pronouns.

Zoom.us

Participants

More

Rename

[Enter new name here:

Ari Perez (they/them)]

Gayle Salamon says, “Recall that the body is active when it “opens itself to others,” including opening itself to the possibility of being wounded by the other” (1983, p. 63). Can I as a trans person /forgive/ cisgender people for the aggressions they inflict on me, whether they are intentional or not? If they do not know that in these instances being trans almost feels like a pin cushion and every aggression — every she/her, miss, etc. — feels like a needle being jabbed in?

01/14/2013

Sometimes I stare at my reflection in the mirror of myself. I stare into my eyes as if I can somehow read or figure out why I am the way I am. I want to crawl out of my own skin and somehow magically turn into someone else. Someone who is happy.

Although not clinically diagnosed with depression in high school, I know now that that is when it started. I could not communicate with you or anyone else about it just because I did not have the proper words to say “Hey, I’m depressed, and I do not like how I see myself.” But in those times, I did not know how I actually /saw/ myself. The way I /saw/ myself in my head was

very different from how I physically looked. I was assigned female at birth (AFAB). Growing up in K-12 I never felt like I belonged anywhere, and I tried my best to fit in with other kids, but something in me felt like I was not being true to myself.

Gloria Anzaldúa writes that “there is something compelling about being both male and female, about having entry into both worlds” (p. 19). I would like to extend this thought to the idea of having the lived experience as a Latina first-generation-daughter of immigrants and then currently transing into a different space, one of privilege, to be viewed and now have a lived experience as a man. Stryker et al. (2008, as cited in Cuevas, 2018) states, “[t]ransing, ’ in short, is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces. It is a practice that assembles gender into contingent structures of association with other attributes of bodily being, and that allows for their reassembly.” Yet, being a first generation-daughter of immigrants Latina woman is not simply labels put on me, but it is a mindset that I still carry.

As heinz (2016) states, “space, place, and gender collide in my body as much as in my scholarship, establishing my body as a site of transition as much as a site subject to transition. These collisions are physical and psychological, physiological, and philosophical; they are never avoidable” (p. 154). Stryker et al. (2008, as cited in Cuevas, 2018) have similar ideas in how moving across spaces in a /different/ body happens, “transing can function as a disciplinary tool when the stigma associated with the lack or loss of gender status threatens social unintelligibility, coercive normalization, or even bodily extermination. It can also function as an escape vector, line of flight, or pathway toward liberation” (p. 79). This moment in my life where I am entering a new space and leaving another puts me at the crossroads of my gender identity. Although I can argue (and maybe some would agree) that my lived experience is solely the lived experience of a nonbinary person.

A recent study conducted by the Trevor Project (2020) found that 40% of LGBTQ respondents considered attempting suicide in the past twelve months and over half of them self-identifying as transgender and/or nonbinary. While this data is recent, it resonates with my experience and that of my queer/trans friends. Depression and suicide are unfortunately not new to the queer/trans community. When I wrote this journal entry, I knew I was severely depressed, and a big reason why was that I was not sharing who I was with you. Even though, now mom, you laugh and say, “Ah! Yo siempre sabía que

tu eras diferente, y le decía a tu papá, y él se enojaba.” Ahora es chistoso compartir estas historias. Mom, I think if your depression and anxiety had not shown up when it did, I think then you would not have understood what I was going through to some level. And you dad, had you not been by my mom’s side and supported her through her depression and anxiety when it was bad, I do not think you would have understood now what I was going through then.

Gust A. Yep (2013) argues that people should embrace “*thick intersectionality*,” which he refers to as “a deeper and more embodied exploration of the complex particularities of individuals’ lives and identities associated with their race, class, gender, sexuality, and national locations” (p. 123) The “thickness” of intersectionalities that Yep is aiming at is being able to understand personhood and history throughout time and space as an essential part of understanding the lives of people. Throughout this testimonio I examine the *thick intersectionalities* I have held through my lived experiences regarding my transness, Mexican culture, and spirituality. I am sharing personal excerpts from journals I have kept since 2012 so that I can remember where I specifically talked about myself being trans and the transition period of becoming who I am and continuing to become who I am.

¿Recuerdas que mi película favorita de Disney es Mulan? Y la miraba todo el tiempo y cuando la miraba y Mulan estaba cantando Reflection. . . No sé por qué, pero siempre me gustó esa canción. Y ahora es mayor porque de alguna manera dejó su /feminidad/ y se hizo parecer más /masculino/. Y también dice la canción, “Now I see that if I were truly to be myself, I would break my family’s heart.” I do not ever want to break y’all’s hearts. I think this movie, and this song, especially, resonates with other queer/trans folks. It used to make me cry because I did not think I could ever tell y’all that I was queer and much less trans because I was scared of you disowning me and I know both of you say, “no, we would never do that.” But those are the stories that queer/trans kids keep seeing.

There is a lack of positive representation in the media. There is a lack of trans joy and resilience that is not widely shared. Media always gives us queer/trans folks a coming out story, which is white and overdone (e.g., *Boy Erased*, *Happiest Season*). Which then makes me think that /having/ to /come out/ is a very white narrative that is not always safe for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color). Do not get me wrong there is great power to /coming-out/, but at the same time porque no puede haber poder en no más /ser/?
/yo existo para mi, y solo para mi/

For trans people, our bodies are never truly our own. I say this because the trans body is constantly being gazed upon with or without our permission. For example, as I am writing this *testimonio*, in a sense, I am consenting to my trans body to be explored through these words I type. Another example is the fetishization of trans bodies through different mediums of media, again with or without permission. Gayle Salamon says, “The trans body thus becomes something akin to a fetish, and those aspects of bodily transition in particular or transgender experience in general that are motivated by a desire for a specific kind of gender representation, rather than a specific kind of sexual expression” (p. 45). Our trans bodies are fetishized whether it be in a sexual manner or in a scientific manner. Further contributing to our bodies never being ours, we are fighting our oppression against cisgender heteronormative standards that want to put us in boxes by how we should look.

Since my last journal entry in 2013—I think around 2016—I started using they/them pronouns at school. I never told y’all because in Spanish it’s difficult to have gender-neutral language, not impossible, but I think more difficult than in the English language. I had not told y’all I was trans yet, but you knew I was queer since my siblings outed me. I think if they had not outed me, I do not know if I would have ever /come out/ to y’all. I have never felt anger towards my siblings outing me because I saw it as them being more amused that I was dating someone vs. the malintent of them outing me as queer. I had more fear than anything that y’all would stop loving me and kick me out of the house.

Testimonios have been used widely by Latinx scholars to share their vulnerability as a form of collective resistance (Anzaldúa, 1999; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). According to Delgado-Bernal et al. (2012),

Testimonio is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experience as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change. (p. 364).

Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) define *testimonios* as,

Specifically, it is an account told in the first person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness of events. This definition focuses on

testimonios as evolving from events experienced by a narrator who seeks empowerment through voicing their experience. (p. 527).

Cruz's defined purpose of testimonio (as cited in Garcia, 2015) states,

Testimonio serves to challenge dominant discourse such as heteronormativity and address the invisibility of the dispossessed, the migrant, and the Queer (p. 56).

Clearly, *testimonios* have been defined differently by different Latinx scholars, but I think the core of a testimonio is to allow yourself to be vulnerable, to open yourself up, in hopes that your experiences may resonate with others and that they might bring a collective state of being in whatever identity or identities may be seen as valid.

¿Recuerdas que fue la noche antes del cumpleaños de mi mamá? ¿Y Elena y Cesar miraron una foto mía con Patricia en ese momento dándonos un beso? Papá no sabía qué decir y tú no dijiste nada. Por la mañana salí de casa temprano, como a las seis o siete. No regresé hasta las seis de la tarde. Tenía miedo de que me dejaran de querer o me dijeran que me fuera de la casa. Pero tu papi, me abrazaste y me dijiste que me amabas mucho. Mami tuviste más trabajo porque estuviste batallando con Dios y como creciste. Pero, mira, tú fuiste la primera que dijo: “Si dios te hizo así, pos así te quiero mucho”.

Anzaldúa talks about the Shadow-Beast and how there is “fear of going home. And of not being taken in. We’re afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows” (p. 20). She continues to say that we fear that “we will be found out, and the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage.” That there is destruction that happens when it is faced, however, for other Anzaldúa writes, “But a few of us have been lucky -- on the face of the Shadow-Beast we have seen not lust but tenderness; on its face we have uncovered the lie” (p. 20). I was one of the lucky ones who experienced tenderness, support, and love from you.

I told y’all before I left to the East Coast to go to graduate school that I was planning on transitioning. I wrote y’all a letter telling you what I could not tell you face to face, much like I am now. Mami, you sent me a message in our group chat via Facebook.

Y me dijiste, “Cuidense te quiero mucho yo te acepto como eres no me importa lo que tú eres para mi como madre es que eres una buena niña y todo lo bonito que tienes por dentro de tú corazón te quiero y te tengo que respetar cómo eres te quiero mucho dios sabe porque ase las cosas Dios te bendiga cuidate te espero y no quiero que llegues con vergüenza quiero que llegues con tu cara alegre y dulce como tú eres te quiero mucho.”

When I read this, I was in my car, and I was trying so hard not to cry because it felt so surreal to have told y'all how I felt and what I wanted to do. Even more than that to be accepted so quickly when again I was so scared that you might disown me again.

09/23/2019

1st Step — I just got back from having an evaluation to start taking hormone therapy. I feel excited and nervous — but I can finally start being my most authentic self.

I am very happy right now.

After I had been putting it off for months I finally called and made an appointment to start the first few steps on what to expect if I continue to want to be on HRT. I was excited about this. I did not tell y'all because I still did not know how you would feel. Papi, I know that you had difficulty with this. Me dijiste, “te quiero mucho, pero esto no.” Me dolió mucho porque yo pensé que mami iba a ser la que iba tener algún problema con esto pero no, fuiste tu, y me dolió mucho.

10/03/2019

2nd Step — I met w/ Jenna, who tells me about all the info about T and if I got any questions and all that fun stuff. The one thing I'm like super worried about is anger/aggression, that thought occurs mainly because that isn't my first reaction to any situation. So, I really have to start thinking about that and also be mindful that it might be the T.

These first two steps somehow felt like they were gatekeeping trans people from being able to get hormone replacement therapy (HRT). I was excited to be starting testosterone (T) and I thought it would take 6 months at the most. I was wrong, it was much longer than that. I tried not to let this get to me or get discouraged about wanting to transition. What held up the process about getting T was that my blood pressure was a decent place if I was not going to start taking T, but my primary care physician (PCP) wanted me to try to get that lower by consuming less salty foods and exercising.

I understand why they did that. The CDC reports that, “high blood pressure is more common in non-Hispanic black adults (54%) than in non-Hispanic white adults (46%), non-Hispanic Asian adults (39%), or Hispanic adults (36%).” A study by Liao et al. (2016) that conducted an annual survey across the U.S. from 2009-2012 that aimed to improve actions to control high blood pressure in Hispanic communities stated that, “Hispanics with hypertension are less likely to be aware of their condition, to take antihypertensive medication, and to adopt healthy lifestyles to control high blood pressure.” I can see the notion of Latinx people not adopting healthy lifestyles based on y’all, even when we have the means to eat healthier.

However, I think we are the outliers when it comes to the systemic racist structures that are put in place that oppress BIPOC (e.g., Black women dying at childbirth, mental health access, etc). BIPOC have also seen the ways in which institutions continue to fail them in these issues, which then contributes to the distrust of doctors (Armstrong et al., 2007). Yo los oigo cuando a veces hablan de ciertas cosas y no tienen fe en la medicina moderna y usan el curanderismo. Mami, cuando los curas de espanto con un huevo o cuando los das te de anís de estrella. Yo me acuerdo en el curanderismo que usas cuando estaba chiquito y a veces visitan mis tios y tías o amigos tuyos para que tú los curarás. Pero al mismo tiempo creen en la medicina moderna porque cada año íbamos todos juntos como una familia a agarrar la inyección para la flu. It is interesting to see that we— mostly y’all— have mixed western medicine with curanderismo.

I think having grown up in a Catholic home placed this turmoil I battled with when it came to my queerness, my transness, and my spirituality. Me acuerdo que cuando era pequeño yo siempre pensaba, “dios porque me hiciste así?” Pero yo al mismo tiempo cuestioné si existía un dios. Se acuerdan cuando les dije que no creía en dios, y tu papi lloraste? Pero cuando se enteraron que era queer viniste a mí con los brazos abiertos y me dijiste que me querías? I think it is something about being raised in religion and seeing

people spew hate that made me question the existence de dios. I mean now I do not see myself as a god devoted Catholic, pero I do still at times says, “Dios/ universo gracias por darme todo lo que me das. Y por todo lo que no me has dado todavía.” I still pray and talk to diosito y el universo, algo más grande que /yo/. I do not know why but when I say God, it feels very white to me and somehow when I say dios/disoito it feels more like home.

I tell people that I am not religious, but I am spiritual, and I think that comes with the fact that I grew up with religion. However, I also think that a lot of queer/trans people feel this way because we look to astrology to guide us, to help us answer questions, to have another reason why things went they went they did. I think queer/trans people lack a sense of belonging and we want to find a sense of belonging anywhere. So, we create our chosen family, and we choose how we want to be spiritual versus having something like traditional religion be seen as the norm. The freedom to choose who we go to for answers gives us the freedom of being able to choose how we identify ourselves and how we want to present ourselves in spaces, /physico o no/.

03/20/2020

Let's start with talking about T.

So I am going to start taking T until July. At least that's the plan now. Idk what will happen w/ COVID-19. I'm a little sad about that but I also agreed to wait on it because I want to get my blood pressure down or at a steady rate w/o having to take medication for it. Things happen for a reason right? This might just be because it would be too difficult for now during these times. It does suck, but I can wait a little longer.

Talking about distance:

COVID-19 — courses are officially going to be moving online because of it. As of today (03/20/20) it has not been BAD BAD like in California. I miss my parents and my siblings. I wish I was with them. I am hoping that they continue to be safe. These are some scary times and I'm trying not to freak out.

Around this time my university had completely closed, and we had switched to online because of COVID. I was scared because I did not know what was going to happen. Both of you reassured me that it would all be okay. I still have not told you I was transitioning or had started that process except for Elena, and she is good at keeping secrets. I was upset, mostly sad that I was not able to start T because I had been working for it, but I got sidetracked. One of my friends who is in the epistemology field was more angered for me because she said this was some sort of gatekeeping that was happening. We are supposed to trust medical professionals, right? So, I trusted my PCP in guiding me for what was best. I still do. Yo les quería contar que triste estaba este día pero creo que no les conté porque hubo cierta desgana en el apoyo de ustedes. Me querían y aceptaban hasta un cierto punto pero todavía hacían comentarios. Y creo que lo hacían por falta de entendimiento de ser trans.

04/27/2020

Limbo — (transness)

Their bodies and other parties

Yo y Ángel Dolores, who are both non-binary, were talking about being /trans/ and how it feels to be in this constant state of limbo. Si se acuerdan de Ángel Dolores? Siempre preguntan por ella. El estado de ser /trans/ es estar en limbo nunca se siente que hemos acabado. Siempre estamos transformándonos y creciendo en diferentes maneras de /ser/.

LeMaster et al. (2019) collaborated on a collaged relational autoethnography where they explored the relational constitution of non-binary gender subjectivity, “to identify as “non-binary” is to embody dialectical tension with culturally sedimented notions of binary sex and gender based on racist and cisheterosexist standards assigned to each of us at and beyond birth” (p. 358). The way that queerness and transness is viewed has become a very white, skinny, almost heteronormative/cisnormative way of having to exist. While for some that is the goal to /pass/ for others, they might want to cross those invisible divides of our community.

08/22/2020

*My home is going to get rearranged
New curtains, new paint, new furniture*

*I'm excited — it's going to be the home I stayed up dreaming about
and only felt like that's all it could be*

~dreams~

But now — now these dreams are reality

*[I have help from my
friends & family]*

My home — my body will feel how I see it

How I saw it in my dreams

*Changes are scary
But what's scarier is not living my dreams*

Por fin. Mami y papi, les queria decir que por fin voy a empezar en mi transición. After almost a year of starting the process of transitioning I was finally able to get T. In the back of my head, I kept telling myself were they gatekeeping me from getting T? I was excited and I have been excited in my transition. I am transitioning during a pandemic when we are all quarantined. Sometimes it feels like I am in this cocoon. This is something beautiful to experience alone and just /being/ with myself. I mentioned earlier that our trans bodies never seem to be our own because we are under constant viewing.

When I decided to transition, I wanted to do this for myself and no one else. I think it is beautiful for people to share their transition out in the open. But I am against that because then there becomes a fascination with someone transitioning, when in fact they are just /being/ themselves. So, when I decided, I was going to do this, I wanted this to be a personal thing for me to have to get to know my body in the ways it was changing. Even now though, my transition and my transness is not my own. I share with my closest friends how my transition is going and the changes I am seeing, and I am writing this

and sharing it in hopes to share with a larger audience — my transness then is up for viewing through these words through a gaze that is not my own. More than that: I am sharing my trans joy and my trans resilience.

10/20/2020

Para papi y mami,

Nunca he sido una persona que se exprese muy bien cuando habla especialmente en español. Por eso les escribo esta carta. Les quiero contar muchas cosas. Los extraño mucho y los amo mucho. Si me hubieran preguntado cuando era pequeño, cómo me imaginaba mi vida, nunca pensé en esto.

Nunca pensé que iba a empezar a realmente vivir como yo me siento y me miro en mi cabeza.

Y esa es la diferencia, ¿no? Cuando eres trans lo sientes en tu corazón y cuando no miras en el reflejo en el espejo cómo tú te miras, es como si te vieran clavar un cuchillo en tu corazón. ¿Y crees Dios por qué me hiciste? Pero Dios te hizo cómo debes hacer, incluso si eso te causa dolor. A veces de ti mismo.

Lo que quería decir realmente es que no se como agradecerles por ser mis padres. Son los padres más maravillosos y me dan tanto amor que lo siento desde acá. Me han ayudado muchísimo pero especialmente en como soy.

Me han ayudado a crecer en la persona que soy hoy. Por ustedes por el amor y el apoyo que me dan, puedo hacer la persona que soy y todo lo demás no importa. Si pudieran mirar que feliz estoy.

Por fin estoy feliz, pero muy feliz. Gracias.

I wrote this letter for y'all after I had finished facetimeing with you. Mami, me dijiste que les estabas contando a mis tios y tias que me estaba transicionando. Y me sorprendió que todos ellos dijeron que todavía me querían y que están orgullosos de mi. For a long time, I created a distance between them. Why? I think it was because I was trying not to get hurt by their

rejection or the possibility of them not loving me for who I am. In an urgency to protect myself I created the possibility that I was not loveable by them and that did not matter to me, but it did. I am happy that you told them for me because I would have not known that their love has always been there. They also provided me comfort in most of them saying, “dios haci te hico, y así te queremos.” As a queer/trans person there is constantly an aggression being thrown at me at an institutional level and I did not want to experience that at an interpersonal level, from my family.

I am four months into my transition. It has been great so far and I am much happier. I did not think I would ever get here. To my five-year-old me who tried peeing standing up and would love to wear masculine clothing did not know. To my fourteen-year-old me who thought having to exist was the worst thing that could happen to me and that hated looking at themselves in the mirror did not know. To my twenty-three-year-old self who thought that knew something did not feel right but did not know what it was did not know. To my twenty-seven-year-old self—right now—who knows that I am who I am supposed to be. Alomejor siempre voy a estar en limbo, en ese estado de ser / TRANS/. Y eso está bien, porque estoy feliz.

Con mucho amor,
Ari

References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands = la frontera : the new mestiza*. San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Armstrong, K., Ravenell, K. L., McMurphy, S., & Putt, M. (2007). Racial/ethnic differences in physician distrust in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(7), 1283–1289. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2005.080762>
- Calafell, B. M. (2007). Mentoring and love: An open letter. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies, 7*(4), 425–441. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708607305123>
- Cdc. (2021, March 22). *Hypertension prevalence in the U.S.: Million hearts®*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved August 28, 2022, from <https://millionhearts.hhs.gov/data-reports/hypertension-prevalence.html>
- Cruz, C. (2012). Making curriculum from scratch: *testimonio* in an urban classroom. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 45*(3), 460–471. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698185>
- Cuevas, T. J. (2018). *Post-borderlandia chicana literature and gender variant critique*. Rutgers University Press.
- heinz, matthew. (2016). Spatial transitions in Communication Studies. *Women's Studies in Communication, 39*(2), 153–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2016.1176808>
- LeMaster, L., Shultz, D., McNeill, J., Bowers, G. (G.), & Rust, R. (2019). Unlearning cisheteronormativity at the intersections of difference: Performing queer worldmaking through collaged relational autoethnography. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 39*(4), 341–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2019.1672885>
- Liao, Y., Siegel, P. Z., White, S., Dulin, R., & Taylor, A. (2016). Improving actions to control high blood pressure in Hispanic communities — racial and ethnic approaches to community health across the U.S. project, 2009–2012. *Preventive Medicine, 83*, 11–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2015.11.027>
- Liu, W. M. (2017). White male power and privilege: The relationship between White Supremacy and social class. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 64*(4), 349–358. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000227>

- Madison, D. S. (1999). Performing theory/embodied writing. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19(2), 107–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10462939909366254>
- Martinez, S., (2019). Lessons From My Battle Scars: Testimonio’s Transformative Possibilities for Theory and Practice. In L.H. Hernandez, S. De Los Santos Upton, D. Bowen, & A. Martinez (Eds.), *Latina/o/x Communication Studies: Theories, Methods, and Practice* (Pp. 335-370). Lexington Books.
- Reyes, K. B., & Curry Rodríguez, J. E. (2012). *Testimonio*: origins, terms, and resources. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 45(3), 525–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2012.698571>
- Ono, K. A. (1997). A letter/essay I’ve been longing to write in my personal/academic voice. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61(1), 114–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570319709374566>
- Yep, G. A. (2013). Queering/quaring/kauering/crippin’/transing “other bodies” in Intercultural Communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 6(2), 118–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2013.777087>
- National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health - the trevor project.* (2020). Retrieved from <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/The-Trevor-Project-National-Survey-Results-2020.pdf>

Jotx Que No Pudo Ser

Xamuel Bañales

Abstract

There are many styles of writing, and each has their own considerations and purpose. Academic or scholarly writing is a form that explores ideas, concepts, or arguments that require “concrete” evidence, sources, or data for support. This type of writing is often formal, standardized, and adheres to a series of guidelines, such as formatting essays with in-text citations and a works cited page. But how does one write about personal, reflective, and metaphysical experiences that express deep affect and emotions? This essay tells a story about friendship, spirituality, and life and death through the genre of creative nonfiction, which describes a form of writing that invites new ways to understand the world and our place in it through a style that blends ideas, flavors, and techniques. The creative aspect of the genre doesn’t mean inventing or describing something that didn’t exist but telling stories about actual events and people in a vivid or compelling manner that seeks to make an impact, potentially reaching a wider audience.

Bruj(ot)ería

En la sala, se encontraba una mesa de vidrio con mantel color azul verde. Decorando la tela: copa, agua, concha, y copal; también había una veladora, encendedor, botellita de alcohol, baraja de cartas, y un montón de collares coloridos, texturas, energías, y más...

A decorated glass table prepared for “occult” matters is what I saw inside my friend Corali’s apartment when I entered. I wasn’t surprised to see the esoteric counter nor he dressed in white. I already knew he was a priest of *Lukumí*—often referred to as *santería*—the Yoruba religion brought by enslaved West Africans to the Americas that merged with various Roman Catholic and Indigenous traditions. Because my friend and I lived in different states in the U.S., my visit was the first time we had seen each other in months. I was in town for a job interview, so I took advantage of the opportunity to visit him after I was done with formal matters. Once inside his home, we greeted each other with a hug and then sat down to catch up on some *chisme*. In time, Corali asked if I wanted a tarot reading to get more insight about the job prospect. I agreed.

I sat across from Corali as he lit candles and incense. There was silence in the room except for the whisper of his prayers and the shuffling of the beautifully designed cards. Eventually, he asked me to divide the deck a few times before placing it on the table like an open fan. Through the rising smoke, I gazed at the stunning spread with inquisitive eyes. I cautiously selected several cards, slowly placing them face up, one by one at the center of the table. Corali contemplated the card arrangement and then began reading them. But, before saying much, he froze for a moment, and everything stopped. Seconds later, my friend turned his head slightly to his right shoulder and declared, “¡Oye, aquí hay un muerto!”

I was stunned to hear Corali announce that a deceased person was present with us. I thought the tarot reading would provide clarity about the possibility of employment, not open a channel of communication with the spirit world. Corali explained that it was unusual—but not impossible—to have a departed soul randomly appear when it did not concern the matter. I wondered: Who was this spirit? What did this spirit want to communicate? Why now? I thought that perhaps the spirit was a family member I knew, such as my *abuelita* who I grew up with.

However, Corali quickly confirmed that the visiting spirit was not an elder: “*Es un joven chaparrito*. He is being flirtatious; he likes you. You know, *¡creo que es una jota!*” Who could this young, playful, possibly Queer spirit be? No one in particular came to mind. I figured it was a random entity that wasn’t connected to me in the “human” world. “I see a lot of water. *Su nombre comienza con...’E’*,” my friend continued. In a split second, shivers scurried down my spine—an invisible lightning bolt of cosmic energy ran through my chakras.

“*¿Edgardo?*,” I hesitantly replied. “*Sí*,” Corali affirmed, “*Él está aquí*. He says he has suffered an injustice and needs your help.” Speechless, I wasn’t sure how to respond. I simply stayed quiet as my ears warmed up and little beads of sweat trickled down the side of my forehead. My friend proceeded: “He says his time here on earth was cut short too soon. He died very young, you know—something about not fulfilling his mission. That he hasn’t been able to rest since his death, wandering around, roaming all over earth. He’s trying to find justice and wants you to help him.”

Edgardo

I first met Edgardo in Santa Barbara, California, when we both attended the local community college during the mid-1990s. I don’t recall exactly how or where we met. It might have been at a M.E.Ch.A student organizing meeting, at an E.O.P.S. function that was geared towards low-income and first-generation college students, or in an Ethnic Studies class. What I do remember, though, was that he was about five feet tall, had straight jet-black ear-length hair, full lips, almond-shaped eyes, and was originally from Guatemala but raised in the downtown of Los Angeles. He was also a Communication Studies major, loved to party, and was very flamboyant with a cocky but humorous attitude. “Beautiful faces take you places, so I’m going all around the world!” he often joked. My first impression of him was that he was fun to have around, and his flaring personality made me wonder if he was Queer. I secretly hoped he was because then this would mean that we shared an important aspect of our identity. But living in a primarily working-class Mexican immigrant community in a relatively small city, homosexuality was not a topic that was discussed in a positive way back then, unfortunately. This is probably why he never said anything about his sexual orientation and neither did I. Despite—or perhaps because of—this, we quickly became friends.

At the time, both of us weren't old enough to enter the bars downtown—legally, anyways. Our best option to have fun with other college students was to go to the nearby community of Isla Vista (or IV as locals called it). IV was known for its big party scene, mostly organized by privileged white students from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Edgardo didn't have a car, so I borrowed one to drive us the ten miles there, occasionally accompanied by his or my friends. I didn't drink much, so being the sober driver wasn't a problem. But matters became complicated once Edgardo's mouth welcomed alcohol. Regrettably, liquor turned Edgardo into an obnoxious something else. He would carelessly interrupt people, clumsily bump into things, or get abrasive with loud-mouthed demands. I became increasingly nervous around him once his eyes got hazy because it meant that he was totally drunk, and his behavior would drastically change. If Edgardo wasn't saying inappropriate things to strangers, he was accidentally knocking drinks out of their hands. I worried that he would irritate someone to the point they would instigate a fight. In fact, there were many moments when this almost happened. To avoid further complications, I often left the parties early, practically dragging Edgardo away. "The night is still young!," he repeatedly complained, sounding like a broken record player as I drove us to our respective homes.

Over time, the friendship changed. Although we regularly talked at school, I didn't go to parties with him as often as before. On the few occasions that we went out, he would catch a ride with me, but then would stay with one of his friends in IV to avoid having to leave the parties early. Sometimes I questioned if he invited me out simply because he needed a ride. Regardless, I felt that we had a special connection—we were friends.

Once, my cousin and I planned an overnight road trip to go clubbing in Tijuana, Mexico—there, we were above the minimum legal drinking age. Edgardo joined us, which turned out to be a big mistake. After hours of driving to our destination and checking in to the hotel, we arrived at a nightclub decorated with bright neon lights that played pulsating house music. Mostly young, drenched, and thirsty bodies danced and drank the night away inside the club, and we entered with big smiles across our faces to lose ourselves in the visceral experience of having fun. In between several rounds of ordering drinks, Edgardo randomly met a group of people from Los Angeles.

After hours of partying, and tired from the long drive, my cousin and I were ready to end the night. When we told Edgardo that we were heading back to the hotel, he announced he was staying behind with his newfound friends.

I worried because this meant that we would split up. At a time before cell phones and social media, how would Edgardo contact us if anything were to happen, especially since he was drinking? We tripled-asked if he was certain about staying, if he trusted his new friends, and if he remembered how to return to the hotel. "I'll be fine," he eventually yelled, before vanishing into the colorful flashes of disco lights and smoke-covered crowd. I was going to chase after him, but my cousin stopped me. "You know how he gets," my cousin declared. "Plus, he's an adult. Let's get out of here." My cousin and I left the club, assuming Edgardo would sooner or later show up at the hotel.

The next day, restless after having slept on rock-hard beds, we checked out of the room and waited for Edgardo outside the old and worn-out hotel building. With growling stomachs, we stood sweating under the hot sun, hoping that Edgardo would appear at any moment. Edgardo never showed up, so we drove the 235 miles back to Santa Barbara without him. A few days later, Edgardo called me over the phone. With a voice red with anger, Edgardo accused me of not being "a true friend" for leaving him behind at a nightclub in Mexico with strangers; I reminded him that he was the one that got drunk and disappeared. We went back and forth arguing who was at fault, going around in circles to nowhere. After the heated conversation ended, so did our friendship. The ground had parted in half and an empty chasm of icy silence came between us.

As friends, Edgardo didn't say much about his life or family, rarely sharing anything personal. Before our falling-out, he had disclosed that he had several siblings and was very young when his family migrated to the U.S. from Guatemala. In one conversation, I alluded to the different histories of Chicanos and Central Americans, such as the dirty wars that had recently occurred in places like El Salvador and Guatemala. With piercing conviction he asserted, "Yes! You have no idea about all the violence that my people went through!" When I probed him to say more, he claimed he was too young to remember any details and quickly changed the subject. At another time, he once revealed that he and some of his siblings had moved to Santa Barbara to get away from the problems they faced in Los Angeles. When I asked about the types of challenges they encountered there, he responded vaguely by referencing difficulties common to urban settings, like the presence of gangs, drugs, and street violence. At one point during our friendship, Edgardo lost a sibling to cancer, leaving a newborn behind. Hearing this was very heartbreaking, but Edgardo didn't really say much about the loss, carrying on as if everything

was fine. I was left to wonder about the many complexities and fleeting details of his life. Getting to know Edgardo was like trying to assemble a puzzle with broken or missing pieces.

Jotx Que No Pudo Ser

After months without speaking, Edgardo and I casually bumped into each other on campus. Although the encounter was initially awkward, we ultimately made peace by resuming the friendship again. As part of our reconnection, Edgardo invited me to his friend's party in IV and insisted that I join him, especially because the fall semester was almost over. I was happy to reunite again and imagined us having fun together as we celebrated the end of classes. After some convincing, I agreed to go. But, unlike the other times we went out, I told him in a firm tone that I was not going to deal with any drama. I also made it clear that I would attend the party only for a short time since I still had to study for an upcoming final exam. Edgardo agreed and said things had changed since the last time we had gone out.

Shortly after arriving at the party, Edgardo started to drink, as usual. One beer, then two, then three....It was around midnight when I announced that I was leaving. I asked if he wanted a ride back to his apartment, but he declined. Instead, he stated that he would spend the night with his "close friend" Nicoleen who was at the party and lived nearby. Before I left, I asked her if it would be okay if Edgardo indeed stayed over. "Yes! I'll take care of him," Nicoleen affirmed. "See—," Edgardo interrupted, "It's all good!" I asked again to make sure that she was fine with him staying. "Don't worry! It's cool," she confirmed. I said goodbye and I left home. A few days later, I received an unexpected phone call with disturbing information.

Edgardo's sister called me to ask if I knew of his whereabouts. Since this was the first time Edgardo's sister had ever reached out, the phone call was alarming. In an unsettling tone of worry, she said that Edgardo hadn't been home in a while and hadn't heard from him. I explained that I had gone with him to a party a few nights before, but that he stayed behind with one of his friends. After an awkward silence, she asked me to return the call if I heard anything from him or his whereabouts. Later that evening, his sister called again, this time panicking and sobbing. After catching her limited breath, she announced the shocking news: "They found Edgardo dead in the ocean; he drowned!" I felt the weight of grief like an anvil sink deep into the insides of my gut. Trembling yet paralyzed, I was dumbstruck. What? Did I hear

correctly? Was I dreaming? After an agonizing pause, I tried to give more details about the night with Edgardo, to cope with the spinning of confusion and cries. But she interjected, “—You shouldn’t have left him at the party,” before hanging up on me. Aloof, gazing into nothingness, I spiraled into the surreal: I hallucinated and saw Edgardo’s lifeless, blueish grey body washed up ashore...ugly feelings of guilt engulfed me because of the eerie twist of fate that took place the last night I saw him.

Eventually, the police called to interrogate me—anyone that had contact with Edgardo on the day of his death was considered a suspect. The detective asked me many intrusive questions, but one shook me out of my wits: “Were you and Edgardo lovers?” When I heard this, it felt like an electrical current of high voltage had seared my flesh. My blood suddenly rushed to my head, and I felt exposed—but exposed of what? Edgardo and I had never been lovers, let alone talked about anything Queer. Despite this, somehow the question brought to light the possibility of his/my/our Queerness, as if the secret, unspoken Jotería connection that we shared was now uncovered, like a wounded bleeding vein. Because my alibi was sound, I was no longer implicated in the case. Still, I always wondered why the detective asked me the question about being lovers. Was it routine to ask such questions in investigations that are unresolved? Did sexual politics have something to do with Edgardo’s death? What really happened the night of his passing?

Spiritual Healing

After speaking about Edgardo to my *Lukumí* priest friend, I felt a calm energy fill the room. Corali told me Edgardo’s spirit was happy to remember him, and that he thanked me for the time we spent together while he lived. “*Pero hay una injusticia relacionado a su muerte,*” continued Corali before pausing. What could be the injustice that surrounds Edgardo’s death? The only thing I could think of was the way he died—that is, the way authorities explained his death. I told Corali that, as far as I knew, officials declared Edgardo’s death as an accident: that he fell from the ledge of a house on a sea bluff somewhere in IV. My friend professed, “Edgardo’s spirit says that story is a lie...something about a group of people witnessing; something related to hate.” And then I envisioned a dispute taking place with Edgardo, as he struggled to save his life before being pushed off the edge of the cliff into the ocean. Did people watch him fall and drown? Did a crime motivated by race or sexual orientation cause his death? Was his alcoholism the reason for his doom? Did any of these reasons matter after the fact?

Coralí continued: “Edgardo says that there was a group of people who witnessed his death, but they lied or stayed quiet during their interrogation; he hasn’t been able to rest because of this injustice. But Edgardo says that one of witnesses might eventually come clean with the truth because the incident keeps haunting them. The truth doesn’t allow them to be at peace either.” I wondered if Edgardo’s friend Nicoleen was part of this group, slowly being eaten inside by the truth of that night. I asked Coralí how Edgardo wanted me to assist him. My friend responded, “He wants you to help him complete his unfulfilled mission on earth by telling his story, so that other young people can learn from his life. He wants his life to have a purpose.” My body shivered as I thought about his spirit’s request. After some debriefing, I thanked Coralí and we hugged each other goodbye.

After returning to California, I contacted another friend who is also a Lukumí priest. We met to gather around a spiritual altar of white cloth, candles, incense, flowers, and water. As a portal for communication with the deceased, we prayed so that Edgardo would find peace and finally rest. A sense of serenity, like awakening to lavender mist, surrounded the space after we closed the ceremony. Later that night, I visited the ocean to reflect on everything; I needed time with Yemayá—great mother orisha of the sea.

Years later, I stared across the tombstones scattered across the green fields of the cemetery where Edgardo was entombed. I hadn’t visited his grave since the funeral, when he was buried there in mid-December of 1996—he was twenty years old. In sacred silence, I read his plaque:

“SIEMPRE ESTAS CON NOSOTROS WE LOVE YOU
YOU ARE IN OUR HEARTS TE QUEREMOS
WE MISS YOU GOD BLESS YOU”

I decorated his commemorative inscription with flowers, and I lit some *copal* while I prayed and sang in Edgardo’s honor. My eyes glistened with tears that reflected the afternoon sun as I asked the universe to bless Edgardo, to gift him light wherever he may be, and that his life serve as an inspiration to many Joto/a/xs and others—that his life and death were not in vain....Maybe the memory of Edgardo can remind us of the interconnection between mind, body, and spirit, the interrelation of all things human and non-human, that the divine exists from within and without, and that love and joy are healing medicines that all of us need.

On the Wings of a Hummingbird: Marco Castro-Bojorquez's Jotería Activism

Andrew Spieldenner and José A. Romero

The hummingbird's work appears effortless. Wings that pump hundreds of times, a blur next to the strong chest and body. The hummingbird strains to stay still, a herculean effort as it would be easier to just buzz through the world the way they could, but the rest of us are slower. Our demands will be the death of them.

Marco Castro-Bojorquez came into our lives at different times but left us together. He was an artist, an activist, a friend, an ally, a lover and a mess. He identified with the colibri, an indigenous term for hummingbird in Mexico. Marco brought beauty into discussions about advocacy, he demanded we make rooms larger and more accessible, he argued for the more that could be done, he volunteered for far too much, and he was valued far too little. Highly active in the HIV field, Marco was insistent that organizations had to do more for marginalized groups, that HIV as a disease and public health issue was part of a story that constantly dehumanized us. The HIV/AIDS epidemic was marked by massive community organizing because governments refused to acknowledge HIV/AIDS decimating our communities at the outset. The epidemic and the field changed after effective treatment became available and more resources were put into clinical services (Spieldenner et al., 2019). Marco critiqued the HIV field for reducing people living with HIV to numbers like treatment adherence and patient visits, especially when those people were also LGBTQ, people of color, young people, people who use drugs and sex workers. Marco believed that our communities needed more than medication to thrive.

Marco had a difficult time holding down full-time work, and often lived on sporadic consulting jobs or speaking gigs. Even so, Marco agreed to be present, advocate and train at a range of events hosted by various non-profits, universities and organizations who relied on him to represent himself and his multiple communities. In his last decade, he lived between Los Angeles, rural California, and Reno before returning to his family in Mazatlán during the COVID-19 pandemic. He planned to move to North Carolina and start a new initiative focused on language justice. He died in 2021, within 48 hours of his return to the United States after reconciling with his home in Sinaloa, Mexico.

Experiencing a violent homophobic attack, Marco fled Sinaloa when he was in his early twenties. Like many Mexican migrants, he found sanctuary and work in Los Angeles. Marco was diagnosed with HIV soon after arriving in the US, and this served as a core to his organizing. He started creating a life in advocacy, working with various organizations that focused on various communities (youth, trans people, immigrants, LGBTQ families) across a range of issues including the law, HIV, human rights, language access, disability, criminalization, sex work, substance use, healing and trauma (Murphy, 2021). He created two documentaries about Latinx parents accepting their queer children (Alfaro & Castro-Bojorquez, 2011; Castro-Bojorquez, 2015). He founded and sat on the Steering Committees and boards of multiple community groups.

Both authors knew Marco through community organizing in different areas, one with a people living with HIV network and the other through language justice activism in the HIV field. We met through Marco, and in the many memorials following his death, we grew closer. Marco's life is so much connected to his *Jotería*, from his journey fleeing Mexico to his activism to his vision of the future. We recognize that LGBTQ people of color live in precarity, and that the record of our lives is often hidden or denied (Brouwer & Morris, 2021; DasGupta 2014). We record his activism as a means "to create interventions in history so their lives, and our moments together, continue to exist" (Spieldenner, 2021, p. 127). This article brings forth Marco as a figure that continues to exist, a haunting that exists between us as activists and friends. In this summoning, we look at Marco Castro-Bojorquez's *jotería* activism in terms of queer migrant trauma, the need to speak in tongues, and querying a *jotería* future.

Jotería Activism as a Theory in the Flesh

We approach Marco Castro-Bojorquez as a figure of *jotería* activism. Hames-Garcia (2014) notes that as "jotería, our bodies and our *selves* are lived legacies of colonialism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, sexism, and heterosexism" and as such "these social and political processes cannot be adequately theorized by without attending to our personal experiences" (ital. original author, p. 136). Only by exploring the personal experiences can the larger social processes that marginalize be understood and shared with others. Queer people of color are often gaslit into believing that the marginalization we experience is unproven and unreal, and dismissed from community concerns as "minor" (Ferguson, 2019). Believing in our own experiences,

traumas and joys and exploring them in their larger socio-historical context becomes a “theory in the flesh,” one way of sense-making (Gutierrez-Perez, 2020). Theory in the flesh becomes an integral jotería practice, declaring one’s presence and enabling community to form through connections.

Jotería is not just a way of saying “queer” in Spanish. Queer as a theory and practice resists and disrupts normative formations of identity and ways of knowing, often through the lenses of sex, desire, pain, community and the body. Jotería flows from the specific intersections of culture, colonialism, gender and sexuality found most in Latinx, and particularly Mexican, roots. While jotería is disruptive like queer, it also unsettles, as it has a place embedded within cultural and ethnic norms. Madrid (2018) theorizes famed singer Juan Gabriel’s vocal and performative excesses as joto and therefore “*jotería* as a kind of libidinal economy, an economy of desires that, like *secreto a voces*, exposes the absences, silences, anxieties, contradictions, and fears of Mexican and Latin American heteronormative discourses” (ital. original author, p. 102). This communal connection, even through critique and marginalization, is vital in jotería activism.

At the intersections of multiple social, historical and institutionalized forces including homophobia, xenophobia, colonialism, patriarchy, racism and capitalism, Jotería calls for social change, a more livable and just world. In writing about the Pulse shooting in Orlando (where a lone gunman killed 49 and hospitalized an additional 53 people attending Latinx night at a popular gay club), Gutierrez-Perez (2017) asks “what acts of advocacy and civil engagement does this moment demand from us? (p.153)” Further, Gutierrez-Perez notes how interconnected Jotería lives are, as this event marks the community across time and space, age and gender identity. Ayala, Cortez and Hebert outline their jotería praxis in HIV prevention: one that includes understanding and uplifting community knowledge, as well as the use of humor and multiple kinds of media in order to engage and reach the community within specific cultural contexts. Ayala, Cortez and Hebert (2009) insist, “[d]esire, like knowledge, can connect us more closely to one another... When we don’t share our knowledge openly, loneliness, isolation, depression, and even death ensue” (p. 171). Jotería activism can perhaps be defined by the insistence for working *within* and *for* the community to effect more connection, increase communal agency, and reduce power distances across institutions and positions, using specific cultural mechanisms, inflections and conversations already occurring amongst the people.

Marco Castro-Bojorquez believed that the personal was political, that the ways we engaged each other mattered, demonstrating our own commitments to repeating destructive cycles or towards a liberatory vision. DasGupta (2014) points out that queer migrants “encounter between regimes of national security, immigration regulations and bodies of LGBT/HIV positive immigrants occur in the interstitial shadow spaces between nation-states, ability and (dis)ability, perversity and respectability” (para 30). Marco had this way of talking about human rights that compelled even cynics of international law (much less critics of the category of the “human”) to embrace the possibility that we could write rights that would enable us to live together. Human rights were less an injunction to bring people to court (though that may certainly have been deemed necessary at various times) than an invitation to understand ourselves beyond the nation-state, beyond the trappings of statecraft and its delimitation of possibility.

As a queer immigrant living with HIV, Marco’s critiques of HIV were typical of him: practical and discursive, always pointing out what more could happen. He talked about racial justice and HIV in the context of colonialism and capitalism, and he envisioned philanthropy as a means of resourcing more community-led liberation endeavors in the field (Racial Justice Framework Group, 2017). As a cultural producer, he insisted that the genre of HIV/AIDS memoir did not belong wholly to gay men, much less gay cis-gender white men. Rather, the celebration of gay men as the sole architects and activists in HIV does two things: it denies the people who were there (comprised of cisgender and trans women, lesbians, people who use drugs, sex workers, immigrants, people of color, HIV-negative allies); and it compounds processes of marginalization that resulted in the higher mortality of particularly trans people, people who use drugs, sex workers and people of color (Ferguson, 2019). Marco’s legacy is one way of undoing that discursive trap. His commitment to trans, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary folks highlight a commitment to solidarity over solidity, even the solidity of the solidarity others would express to him as a result of his trenchant anti-establishment critiques. The many memorials served to underscore this loss and his profound impact on multiple communities (Murphy, 2021). Marco continues his journey of migration, from this life to the next.

Queer Migrant Trauma

Marco Castro-Bojorquez’s life was marked by his migration from Mexico to the United States. Migration is an increasingly politicized event. Where once refugees from Viet Nam and Cuba were welcomed to the United

States, for instance, more recent discourses around migration center on terms like “invaders” and “criminals,” and emphasize the unwantedness of being dispossessed (DasGupta, 2018). Yet people flee homes for a variety of reasons, including structural issues like changing politics, economies and climates, as well as personal and communal ones like homophobia, violence, ethnic and racial discrimination, and religious persecution. These journeys mark a community and people, from both what they are running from and the places where they find themselves calling home (Andrade, 2019).

Marco's sexuality left him unsafe in his hometown. He fled from homophobic violence and the fear for his life. His reactions were quick. Like the colibri, he would retreat at the first sign of threat. He thought he had found safe havens in LGBTQ organizations, but instead was marginalized due to his lack of degrees, his recreational practices, his politics, and his adamant belief in community knowledge. Like most people of color and people living with HIV, Marco was often the lowest paid person on his team, and was included in projects most often to provide English/Spanish translation rather than his many other expertises (Spieldenner et al., 2019). Gay non-profit organizations in the US tend to reward more normative presentations, backgrounds and politics (Ferguson, 2019). The trauma that people have from living in a homophobic and heternormative world, and the processes they use to manage that pain are often ignored in normative assumptions about society (Gutierrez-Perez, 2020).

We are at a conference and put together as roommates. There is a knock on the door at 3 a.m., a time where any caller is probably not good news. I am surprised the room is empty. I put on shorts and a t-shirt, and open the door to the campus police and a disheveled Marco. He is looking at the floor, embarrassed. “Do you know him?” one uniform asks. “Yes, of course. Thank you for bringing him back.” I pull Marco in and shut the door firmly on the security as they start to ask questions. “We will talk to you in the morning,” I say through the door.

Marco walks to his bed. We have single beds in this dormitory housing. He starts to explain what happened, a grand adventure involving a man and a ride in a truck in downtown Indianapolis and a robbery. None of it quite makes sense without the subtext of drugs. I do not confront him: I smile and make what I hope are comforting noises. He crawls into his bed, pulling the thin blanket over him. He starts to shake. “Do you want me to hold you?” He nods. I slide in behind him, spooning him. He cries into the night. I whisper into the back of his head, “It's ok, you're here, I'm here” until he sleeps.

Marco always insisted that we needed the space to show up with our trauma. Normative expectations for work and friendship in the US often narrowly script behaviors and interactions, including how we sit, speak and show emotion (Ferguson, 2019). Tijerina Revilla (2014) recalls the broader mission statement for the Association of Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship maintains that a “healthy Jotería embodies *familia* and contributes to a social ethos of humanization and transformation in the face of dehumanizing pressures” (ital. original author, p. 258). This transformation has to include the ways that we interact, what our expectations are for meaningful communication - the allowances for our coping mechanisms and our wounds. Only in community can some broken parts heal (Jolivet, 2016).

Marco was especially concerned with how people travel between nation states in order to find better, sometimes even just livable, homes. Queer migrants are targeted by violence and extorted in multiple ways: their plight is largely ignored (Andrade, 2019). They face multiple scars in their journeys from institutions and governments that refuse them to being marginalized economically and excluded from education, health and protection services. Marco built altars at community conferences, encouraging people to bring in or create artifacts to commemorate the losses. Andrade (2019) notes “[o]ne world-making possibility is to re-face migrants by actively looking beyond artwork to affectively comprehend the bodily experiences of migrants and to understand their realities outside of the colonialist... space” (p. 213). Through building community altars in conferences, Marco made visible the traumas and faces of people lost.

When Marco died, his family wanted his body returned to Sinaloa. People in Reno, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Raleigh, New York and Washington, DC pulled together a crowd sourcing request to raise the \$10,000 USD required to transport Marco back to Mexico. Marco would have been surprised at the number of people who supported him: he flitted from movement to movement without landing anywhere. In death, Marco migrated back to Mexico with the support of people who had been touched by his activism and art. These included his chosen family, friends, colleagues from various movement work, and people who had seen him speak at an event or watched his documentaries.

Marco talked about pain and healing, community connection and isolation as best he could. He was not perfect in the ways that he conveyed these problems, nor strategic in his coping mechanisms, but he was truthful.

He tried to explain why his spirit hurt, how he could not fit in organizations, movements, and places. He tried but never felt included so he would reach across to others so that they could see they were not alone, that together could be a kind of home, if only for a moment.

Speaking in Tongues/Speaking in Wings

Marco Castro-Bojorquez envisioned social justice and health movements that spoke the language and listened to the peoples they represented. In HIV, this meant people of color, people who spoke Spanish or another language, people with disabilities, people outside of the US, younger and older people, people of different educations, interests and backgrounds (Racial Justice Framework Group, 2017). Marco considered it a failure when HIV advocacy, research, healthcare and programs did not meaningfully engage the people they are meant to serve and represent. Rather than creating possibilities, these can serve to reinforce power structures that relegate people living with HIV to “less than” (Spieldenner et al., 2019). To counter this kind of marginalization, Marco began organizing bilingual people living with HIV who could act as interpreters and translators for online and in-person meetings.

While language is vital, there are other gestures towards communication effectively. Vocalics including tone and pitch, the kinds of accents used as well as the slang, how we perform our gender and sexuality: all of these can be signals to others. Jotería can be both a way to be seen, and a way to welcome. Calvo-Quirós (2014) notes, “recognition becomes possible because we share common codes through which we jota/os operate as a collective... In the process of sharing and recognizing our aesthetic practices as valuable, we reposition our traditionally subjugated and devalued jota/os forms of knowledge at the center of cultural expression” (p. 185). Marco insisted that our practices in meetings were inclusive, that there were spaces for people of various capacities to participate. Marco slipped in and out of Spanish, often explaining his difficulty with expression while explaining something in poetic terms. His actions built a welcome for others, like him, who might not fit in.

Marco was one of the authors of *A Declaration of Liberation*, a manifesto about racial justice in the current HIV movement. He made sure the document centered language in it. The framework proclaims “who counts and is valued as ‘American,’ who deserves public empathy, resources, and rights; and consequently, who is not” (Racial Justice Framework Group, 2017, p. 5). Marco pushed HIV activists to understand how language was embedded

in language, not just about disease but also about people. English-dominant meetings restricted who could participate and colluded with the problematic definition of “American-ness” as English-speaking. Towards his end, he had begun pulling together bilingual English/Spanish activists in the HIV movement to launch the Colibri Academy to work with groups to make their events and documents accessible to participants. The Colibri Academy was funded and launched in 2022.

Jotería Futures?

Marco was concerned with the future, he was aware of how ephemeral our lives were. He took on the colibri as his symbol. The hummingbird has a life cycle that varies. The vast majority of hummingbirds die in their first year. If they manage to live past that, they can last, depending on the species and environmental conditions, three to six years. Within that time, they can mate and reproduce, but they are driven to their work in the ecosystem. The hummingbirds blur along, from plant to plant, helping the whole. From his own experience as a queer/migrant/living with HIV/coping with capitalism/traumatized person, Marco created work that grounded communities and presented possibilities of a future.

Marco Castro-Bojorquez’ two documentaries, *Tres Gotas de Agua* (Alfaro & Castro-Bojorquez, 2011) and *El Canto del Colibri* (Castro-Bojorquez, 2015) covered various aspects of Latinx immigrant parents and their queer kids. They explore a community context that stretches across sexual and gender identities, cultures, immigration status, and generations. They present a jotería reading of family, one that is consciously aware of holding space for the unlike, the queer, the potentially targeted. In each, the parents discuss their journey with their child and their communities. In the documentaries, family is expansive and radical in its inclusivity.

While children are one way of shaping family, Marco’s work called forth a larger vision of family, community and home. In *Tres Gotas de Agua*, one woman, Mirna, says, “... I believe that if we want to have a safe space for our children, we also need to make sure that, even if no one in my family is gay or bisexual, if I want my family to be safe I also have to make my neighbor’s family, where someone is gay, is safe too” (Alfaro & Castro-Bojorquez, 2011, 2:46-3:15). The idea that what happens with neighbors also impacts your own family counters narratives of individualism that often frame US and capitalist frames of community (Ferguson, 2019; Jolivet, 2016).

Jotería is not about permanence. It exists within culture and community as practices and understandings of particular ways of being. Concepts like “family” and “children” are bonded to ideas of the future as concrete connections between the family to tomorrow, yet Jotería are also family and embedded within community. But the HIV pandemic has had an immense impact on queer mortality, and has limited the number of queer elders (Ferguson, 2019). In addition, the processes of remembering the dead have continued to focus on people who have managed to make their lives legible to various institutions such as publications and academia (Brouwer & Morris, 2021).

Marco struggled with his own ephemerality: he did not have steady work, he had difficulty with finishing projects as more and more opportunities opened. Marco envisioned a more just world, a more creative one, a more passionate and healing one. He passed between social movement spaces (particularly HIV, youth organizing, trans rights, prison and immigration reform) like the colibri, quickly testing them and seeing what was possible in each one. He knew we were not living in that better world, but he recognized that we could not get there without dreaming of those values and practicing them today. The future, for Marco, was never guaranteed, marked as he was by interpersonal and structural violence brought on by HIV, racism, poverty, migration and homophobia.

Conclusion: The Jotería Gift of Marco Castro-Bojorquez

We examine Marco Castro-Bojorquez as a haunting, one where we invite the spirit to stay with us, whispering in our ears, mumbling under and over the other people in the room (Marco could be very clear in his disdain of how conversations were occurring, what words were chosen, and who was taking up space). In their exploration of the grief for their mother, Andrade (2018) points out “ethnic ghosts necessitate nuanced, arduous, and painful mourning processes, though these produce new empowering insights” (p. 141). Marco was not a comfortable figure in life, and his ghost is not any easier. We miss him. His presence still unsettles, pushing leaders to be better, of asking us to dream bigger.

Marco Castro-Bojorquez died within forty-eight hours of returning to the US (Murphy, 2021). He was in a hot tub, on a record-breaking hot afternoon in Reno, Nevada. It was a stunning text to receive, nearly unbelievable. He had so many plans, he had a direction: so much of what we have come to expect

when we talk about “a life.” Both authors received so many odd condolences: it was clear that people did not know what kind of relationships we had with Marco, that we occupied some private part of his life.

If Crimp (2003) articulated that the divide between mourning and militancy was a fantasy to be undone, then Marco’s legacy challenges us to consider that preserving the borders between an “AIDS-death” and a “non-AIDS death” matters most to the agents of that very death. In other words, Marco didn’t die from AIDS. He died from a world not ready to sustain the coalitions that would enable him to live. In *A Declaration for Liberation*, Marco says, “in the work of HIV/AIDS and immigration, I have yet to experience intersectional justice; my grassroots-led work at times feels invisible, or is received with less than an open heart” (Racial Justice Framework Group, 2017, p. 7). Marco died outside.

The *jotería* activism of Marco Castro-Bojorquez brings together a multitude of communities, activists, traumas and visions. Marco’s *jotería* activism was perhaps best exemplified in his statement, “I go through things” - something he would say casually when discussing his plans. He passed through borders and organizations, communities and conferences, asking us to dream more, consider how we speak with each other, and be mindful of the pains that people carry and the space they might need.

The life of Marco Castro-Bojorquez demonstrates key aspects of *jotería* activism, and reveals one grim truth. *Jotería* dances, yells, loves and acts against the backdrop of death (Andrade, 2018; Gutierrez-Perez, 2017). Rather than a view towards long-life, *Jotería* is situated within multiple domains of dying – HIV, violence, poverty and suicide are all more likely amongst gay, bi and queer Latinx (Ayala, Cortez & Hebert, 2009; Brouwer & Morris, 2021). There are generations of *Jotería* whose lives have gone unmarked. This terrain demands a different understanding of living, one that struggles with trauma, grasps the moment, and envisions the future.



References

- Alfaro, J. & Castro-Bojorquez, M. (2011). *Tres Gotas de Agua*. Oakland, CA: BAYCAT and Somos Familia. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLtHcbmvjAg>
- Andrade, L. M. (2018). On the death of mi madre, hauntings, and ethnic mourning. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 38(3), 136-152.
- Andrade, L. M. (2019). CAUTION: On the many, unpredictable iterations of a yellow border sign ideograph and migrant/queer world-making. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 39(3), 203-228.
- Ayala, G. Cortez, J. & Hebert, P. (2009). Where there's querer: Knowledge production and the praxis of HIV prevention. In Marysol Asencio (Ed.), *Latina/o Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and Policies* (p.150-172). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Brouwer, D. & Morris III, C. E. (2021). Decentering Whiteness in AIDS memory: Indigent rhetorical criticism and the dead of Hart Island. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 107(2), 160-184.
- Calvo-Quirós, W. A. (2014). The aesthetics of health and love: An epistemic genealogy of joto/a aesthetic traditions. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 39(1), 181-194.
- Castro-Bojorquez, M. (2015). *El Canto del Colibri*. Oakland, CA: BAYCAT and Somos Familia. Available at: <http://elcantodelcolibri.com/>
- Crimp, D. (2002). *Melancholia and moralism: Essays on AIDS and queer politics*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
- DasGupta, D. (2014). Cartographies of friendship, desire, and home; Notes on surviving neoliberal security regimes. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 34(4). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v34i4.3994>
- DasGupta, D. (2018). Rescripting trauma: Trans/gender detention politics and desire in the United States. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 41(4), 324-328.
- Ferguson, R. A. (2019). *One-dimensional queer*. Medford, MA: Polity Press.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. (2017). Briding performances of auto/ethnography and queer bodies of color to advocacy and civic engagement. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(1), 148-156.

- Gutierrez-Perez, R. (2020). A return to El Mundo Zordo: Anzaldúan approaches to queer of color worldmaking and the violence of intersectional heteronormativity. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 43(4), 384-399.
- Hames-Garcis, M. (2014). Jotería Studies, or the political is personal. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 39(1), 135-141.
- Jolivette, A. J. (2016). *Indian blood: HIV and colonial trauma in San Francisco's two-spirit community*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Madrid, A. L. (2018). Secreto a voces: Excess, performance, and *jotería* in Juan Gabriel's vocality. *GLQ*, 24(1), 85-111.
- Murphy, T. (2021). Remembering Marco Castro-Bojorquez, Mexican-American filmmaker and HIV activist. TheBody.com. Available at: <https://www.thebody.com/article/marco-castro-bojorquez-obituary-filmmaker-hiv-activist>
- Racial Justice Framework Group. (2017). *A declaration of liberation: Building a racially just and strategic domestic HIV movement*. Available at: <https://hivracialjustice.wixsite.com/framework>
- Spieldenner, A.R. (2017). Infectious sex?: An autoethnographic exploration of HIV prevention. *QED: A Journal in LGBTQ Worldmaking*, 4(1), 121-129.
- Spieldenner, A. (2021). To say goodbye. In M. B. Sycamore (Ed.), *Between certain death and a possible future: Queer writing on growing up with the AIDS crisis* (p. 122-131). Vancouver, Canada: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Spieldenner, A. R., Sprague, L., Hampton, A., Smith-Davis, M., Peavy, D., Bagchi, A., Cardell, B., Johnson, V., Brown, G. & Brewer, R. (2019). From consumer to community-based researcher: Lessons from the PLHIV Stigma Index. In P. Kellett (Ed.), *Narrating patienthood: Engaging diverse voices on health, communication, and the patient experience* (p. 151-166). New York, NY: Lexington Press.
- Tijerina Revilla, A. (2014). The Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship: A movimiento for queer Chicana/os and Latina/os. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 39(1), 253-259.

Desde La Preferia de La Milpa: Testimonios de Joteria Rural de Los Ranchos y Pueblos del Sur de Mexico

Luis Oswaldo Esparza

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, my cousin Luis Miguel (pseudonym) invited me and one of my friends to his birthday party at one of his father's *corrales*¹. At the time, a friend and I were visiting my family in the rural outskirts of southern Mexico. Every year since 2012, I found myself negotiating my identity when navigating that particular space because I was under the false assumption that rural Mexico was no place for *gay* men to live. I especially assumed *machismo* and hegemonic masculinity dominated and governed all interactions between folks in the rural. This was until I attended Luis Miguel's party, a moment that changed the way I saw rural spaces forever. As I sat on a wooden fence socializing with Luis Miguel and his friends, whilst listening to the quadruple metered rhythmic sounds of reggaeton music, I turned to see a group of invitees gathering to dance. I paid little attention to them until I saw my hetero, male friend dancing with a couple of other men. This was no ordinary dancing, however. They were ²*perreando*! Immediately assuming the folks at the party would start picking on them (specifically the men), I scanned the *corral* to see people's reactions. To my surprise, nobody seemed to care that these men were dancing so intimately with my hetero friend. This moment marked the beginning of my journey to attempt to understand the intersections between rural subjectivities, sexualities, masculinities, plurality, and co-existence in these rural spaces that are not visible to the settler-colonial prospective. Further, my collaborators and I reflected on an array of resistance strategies they deploy at the face of coloniality which include enclaves, subversive complicity, and disidentification.

¹ Pieces of property where folks grow crops and keep their animals

² dancing seductively

De-Centering MEWCCCUS

One of the starting points for this project was the realization of the lack of representation of people of color especially those individuals who live in rural spaces in other countries such as Mexico. This is because “Queerness, has been associated with modernity in most twentieth-century debates on gender and sexuality” (Ruvalcaba, 2016, p. 8). That is, many of the experiences described in the aforesaid debates and studies centralize the narratives of white, queer individuals and fail to mention any of the experiences of people of color in those rural spaces (metro normative experiences). Examples of these studies in Mexico include Joseph Carrier’s *De Los Otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality among Mexican Men* (1995), Ignacio Lozano-Verdusco’s *Desire, Emotions, and Identity of Gay Men in Mexico City* (2015), Annick Prieur’s *Memma’s House* (1998), and Schuessler’s et al.’s *Mexico Se Escribe Con Jota* (2018). U.S. examples include Kelley Baker’s *Conceptualizing Rural Queerness and Its Challenges for the Politics of Visibility* (2011), David Bell & Gill Valentine’s *Queer Country: Rural Lesbian and Gay Lives* (1995), and Emily Kazyak’s *Disrupting Cultural Selves: Constructing Gay and Lesbian Identities in Rural Locales* (2011). These examples show how much of Queer theory and “Latin American Queer theory, like many other aspects of cultural and knowledge production, is articulated inside coloniality; many of its concepts and arguments have even been articulated within the centers of power and written in the language of the empire” (Ruvalcaba, 2016, p. 10).

It is clear that this language of the empire is written for the consumption of white bodies through the use of “objectivity” as a tool of silence. Kimberley Williams Crenshaw in *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color* (1995) argues that mainstream liberal discourses treat race, gender, sexuality, class, and other identity categories as “vestiges of bias” and “intrinsically negative frameworks.” The experiences of white males are also elevated to the level of generality while the experiences of people of color are reduced to “individual experiences” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 4). Mainstream, eurocentric, white, colonialist, capitalist, centralists, universalists, separatists (MEWCCCUS) are no strangers to these meta-oppressive tactics that seek to silence these conversations of intersections of race, sexuality, and gender. Instead, many mainstream queer theorists, such as MEWCCCUS, see sexuality separate from gender (Hames-Garcia, 2011). Frantz Fanon (1963) calls this the compartmentalizing logic of the West in his book *Wretched of the Earth*. Though many queer theorists of color such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Cherríe Moraga have contributed to the building of

queer theory through their queer-of-color knowledge production, they have ultimately been excluded from Queer genealogies. Instead of validating the contributions of queer theorists of color, MEWCCCUS have proclaimed that they did the groundwork and queer theorists of color simply just “added on” to existing discourses (Hames-Garcia, 2011). In fact, many queers of color represented in queer readings are commonly represented as “the other.” MEWCCCUS discourses have essentially turned into a metanarrative about domestic affairs between white homosexuals (Hames-Garcia, 2011). Muñoz (1999) also stated that “most of the cornerstones of queer theory that are taught, cited, and canonized in gay and lesbian studies classrooms, publications, and conferences are decidedly directed toward the analyzing of white lesbians and gay men” (p.10). MEWCCCUS theorists fail to acknowledge sexuality and gender before the 18th century and situate the beginning of sexuality with the rise of capitalism during the 18th and 19th centuries. *Jotería* scholar Hames-Garcia proclaims that for queer, critical scholars of color studying sexuality and race, “sexuality arises during and alongside violence of European colonialism and indigenous resistance in 16th century, transatlantic slave trade of 17th century, the imperialist wars and expansion of Europe and its former settler colonies in the Americas, southern Africa, and the Pacific in the nineteenth century, and the waves of postcolonial independence in the twentieth century” (Hames-Garcia, 2011, p. 40).

Clearly, MEWCCCUS scholarship is limited in its elitist, exclusionist production of knowledge. Through their metro-normativity and failure to build bridges of discourse with the global south, MEWCCCUS replicate the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000; Halberstam, 2005). It is also clear that MEWCCCUS have “systematically sought to define the newness and uniqueness of their scholarship through a denial of past” (Hames-Garcia, 2011). To further complicate queer discourses, it is vital to talk about the experiences of people of color, especially the experiences of individuals who are not from the U.S. By documenting their narratives, we would be honoring their histories and experiences, amplifying their voices, and complicating queer discourses (Spivak, 2010). Additionally, we can create a space for discourse for individuals who do not fall under essentialized labels of identification that mirror experiences of folks in the United States and Europe (Foucault, 2011; Spivak, 2010). By discourse I am referring to the process of how we bring to life the frameworks of how we see the world (Foucault, 2011).

I propose the inclusion of a community of subaltern, *Jotería Rural*³ in rural, Southern Mexico to shed light on the types of discourses that are escaping the MEWCCCUS eye (Spivak, 2010). Noriega (2014) also agrees that there is still so much research to be done regarding characteristics, meanings, and social political factors of *Jotería* identity in Mexico. Contemporary, *Jotería Rural* have inherited tactics of resistance from ancestral *Jotería Rural* colonized subjects in a state of resistance to those colonial powers. This results in the observation of *Jotería Rural* who engage in resistance tactics. In rural Southern Mexico, my contributors and I found that in that particular space, some of these resistance tactics include resistance through enclaves, subversive complicity, and disidentification. These are all in response to repressive moments in Mexican history. Specifically, oppressive systems used to police sexuality are rooted in its complex history of colonial imposition, settler colonialism, and modernity (Dussel, 1993). Resistance has allowed for *Jotería Rural* to live fulfilling lives throughout this colonial, repressive history. Resistance, thus, should be honored as a legitimate queer experience.

Un Mundo Donde Caben Muchos: On Decolonizing Discourse on Sexuality and Gender

My theoretical perspective is based on de-colonial philosophy and thought. I take from Frantz Fanon, Enrique Dussel, Gloria Anzaldúa, Walter D'Almeida, Ramón Grosfoguel, Aníbal Quijano, and Chela Sandoval. Ultimately, my research is grounded on the idea of plurality where many worlds and identities can co-exist without imposition. Enrique Dussel (1993) calls this possibility Transmodernity. Dussel states that Transmodernity assumes the positive/non-hegemonic moments of modernity. Transmodernity also incorporates pluriversity that will be the fruit of authentic intercultural dialogue. He argues that we should “inform ourselves and learn from the failures, the achievements, and the still-theoretical justification of the creative processes in the face of the globalization of European/North American culture, whose pretense of universality must be deconstructed from the optical multifocality of each Culture” (Dussel, 2012, p. 24). I believe this can also be applied to the epistemologies of sexuality of southern, rural Mexico compared to those of metropolitan centers. That is, instead of imposing “enlightened” MEWCCCUS notions of sexual identity to those in the rural areas, we should honor rural *Jotería Rural*'s ways of identifying and co-existing. I utilized transmodernity as a way to validate my contributors' way of knowing and

³ Rural Jotería from Southern Mexico

identifying. That is, their devalued cultural values were honored. Specifically, their resistance strategies as a valid way of existing as *Jotería Rural*. This lens led me to ask a question that specifically centered rural *Jotería Rural*, a group often ignored by MEWCCCUS: How do the identities of *Jotería Rural* resist despite the repressive ideologies and the dehumanizing and punishing acts that derive from Mexican historical moments?

Platicas: Restoration of Humanity and Respect in Research

In communion with my decolonial theoretical frameworks, I implemented a decolonial methodology called *Platicas*⁴; a methodology that matches my decolonial ideals of consciousness, vulnerability, and respect. I chose this *Platicas* method to center our *modos*⁵ which have also been devalued and excluded altogether by the hegemonic academy (Conlisk-Gallegos, 2018). Thus, a decolonial model that centers the voices of the subaltern communities without speaking for them is a superb fit for this study (Spivak, 2010). Ultimately, I implemented *Platicas* as a decolonial methodology in praxis.

Platicas is a Chicana/o/x methodology with a relational principle that honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge. In other words, the participants are viewed as contributors and co-constructors of the meaning making process. Whether the researcher has a long significant relationship with the contributors, or the relationship is new, it is grounded in *respeto* for the contributor as a holder and creator of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). Fierros & Delgado-Bernal (2016) further argue that *platicas* provide cultural knowledge through more intimate ways in order to add personal voices to academia. These Chicana/Latina feminist methodologies go beyond the collection of data and encompass an extension of ways of knowing and being. Specifically, taking on an activist-scholar role and confronting aspects about ourselves that render us colonized (e.g. our position of power in academia) (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). Becerra & Shaw (1984) stated that *platicas* emerged because of the realization that ethnographies and surveys did not work with Hispanic participants. This is because methods such as structured interviews, ethnographies, etc. follow the Western Anglo logic that is allegedly neutral. A logic of detachment that pressures researchers to detach themselves from their participants. Therefore, dehumanizing them in the process because

⁴ Talks

⁵ ways

they become “of no use” after the study. *Platicas* disrupts Western colonial assumptions that “research must or even could be neutral, unbiased, and split of mind, body, and spirit” (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016, p. 102).

Platicas is also the most culturally appropriate method for Latino/a/x communities. Roberto Gutierrez-Perez (2022) argues that *Platicas* “gather familial and cultural knowledge through the act of communication, and oftentimes, this narrative form produces knowledge by sharing thoughts, memories, ambiguities and new interpretations through personal and group conversation” (p. 37). He further notes that *Platicas* can be a culturally relevant space for *Jotería* through the creation of counter-narratives. He states, “... there are certain topics, areas of interest, and performances that only emerge when in communication with other *Jotería*. These *Platicas* reveal not only areas of mutual recognition with other cultures and identities, but in this historical moment, these narrative forms also showcase the communicative spaces where *Jotería* and Latinas/os generate knowledge and where/how they choose to politically and materially push back on master narratives” (Gutierrez-Perez, 2022, p. 38).

Another component of *Platicas* is building genuine, long-lasting friendships with one's contributors. When I met my contributors, they each invited me to their homes, businesses, restaurants, and various public places. We would have lengthy chats about our experiences with interview questions guiding the topics of conversation. For example, Juan Gabriel (pseudonym), one of my contributors, invited me to his store where we chatted as he tended to his customers. Ricky (pseudonym), another contributor, also invited me to his business and his home where I spoke with him and his boyfriend. Currently, I continue to stay in touch with my contributors and visit them when I get the chance. Because I built authentic rapport with my contributors, they allowed me to audio record them and take notes on their experiences. This practice of centering personal experiences aligns with a genealogy of Chicana feminist methodologies and theories “of the flesh” that seek to center personal experience in relation to social and historical realities through self and collective reflexivity (Moraga, 2020). Finally, I also saw my “participants” as collaborators to the project rather than mere objects of study (which is why I call them contributors rather than participants). Out of respect for their privacy, I also used pseudonyms for my collaborators and the names of their respective homelands (these names were self-selected by my collaborators).

Following My Jotería: Another form of snowball sampling

For this project, I implemented a snowball sampling method for recruiting collaborators. Since I am familiar with the region where this project took place, finding wonderful contributors who were gracious enough to contribute their time to this project was not a challenge. This was because the *Jotería Rural* folks I met on previous trips introduced me to their network of friends. After I spoke to two of my contributors whom I had met year before, they graciously offered to introduce me to friends who were interested in contributing. In essence, I followed Gloria Anzaldúa's (1984) call to "listen to what your *Jotería* is saying" (p. 34). Being *joto* also gives one a special sensibility. I wholeheartedly believe that following my own *Jotería* played a major role in finding contributors. Ultimately, everything fell into place when friends of the contributors introduced me to other acquaintances. Eventually, a total of 10 contributors lent their voices to construct his project.

Analyzing Las Pláticas: Results and Discussion

Before discussing the *Pláticas*, I will first introduce my collaborators. The first collaborators I met were Alex and Trevi. Alex and Trevi both openly identify as Gay and are known by the residents of *Nuevo Fernandez* (pseudonym) as being loud, rowdy, effeminate, and promiscuous. At the time of this project, Alex was 18 years old and Trevi was 20. They are known by the *Nuevo Fernandez* community as *los Gays que se visten de mujer*.⁶ This is because they are comfortable dressing in drag in public as a way of disidentifying. They are both *campesinos*⁷ and work more than 12 hours a day in the fields. Though many community members have great disdain for them, they are also respected and loved by many (specifically younger folks) because of their sensibility, fearlessness, and love for partying.

Subsequently, I met Ricky in a nearby town called *Tenochtitlan* (pseudonym). Ricky disclosed to me that he was 34 years old, identified as Gay, and lived in *Tenochtitlan* all of his life. He also briefly discussed his fascination and passion for drag, beauty pageants, and running his family's fruit business. Rick shared that he had been in an accident when he was employed at *Lechería*

⁶ Gays who dress like women

⁷ Field workers

*Los 41*⁸ (pseudonym). He identifies as *descapacitado*⁹ which added another layer of complexity to his testimony. He discussed with me that his entire forearm was caught in one of the machines. The machine ended up tearing his forearm arm right off his limb. He was immediately terminated from his job for being unable to fulfill his work duties (firing employees after having major accidents is a common practice in this milk processing plant as way for the company to avoid legal problems).

Upon hearing about my project, Ricky's then boyfriend Daniel agreed to assist me. Daniel identifies as Gay and was 25 years old around the time he contributed to this project. He revealed to me that he is originally from a pueblo called *El Grucho* (psydonym) in Northern Mexico but moved to *Tenochtitlan* after his family kicked him out. He disclosed to me that he was not immediately kicked out when *se destapo*¹⁰. He was forced out of his house after he quit the military because his family believed this was the only way to "*hacerlo hombre*¹¹" After he was kicked out, he went to college and received his bachelor's degree in tourism.

Subsequently, I met Neto on one of my periodic trips to *Tenochtitlan* after learning there was a gym there called *Imperial* (psydonym) there. Neto was 28 years old at the time I met him at the gym. He is the manager of a local casino known as *Las Venturas* (psydonym). He identifies as "openly *homosexual*" and has lived in *Tenochtitlan* most of his life. Neto eventually introduced me to his acquaintance Ignacio, a lawyer in charge of signing off on property rights in *Tenochtitlan*. Neto had spoken to Ignacio about the project over the phone and he agreed to be a contributor. We spoke on WhatsApp and he asked me to meet him at his office during his lunch. Ignacio identifies as Gay and was 29 years old at the time I met with him. He disclosed to me that his family is well-known in *Tenochtitlan* because they have lived there for generations and because they are all middle-class. Furthermore, he explained that since his family is so well known, he prefers to be more discreet about his sexuality.

⁸ The 41 Milk processing plant

⁹ Disabled

¹⁰ Culturally translates to "coming out"

¹¹ Make a man out of him

I later met Juan Gabriel through my aunt Claudia. Juan Gabriel identifies as *homosexual* and was 64 years old at the time of this project. Juan Gabriel has lived in *Nuevo Fernandez* most of his life. He did, however, disclose to me that he immigrated to the United States during his youth, but returned to take care of his mother when she became ill. Using the money he made in the United States, he opened a successful store in Nuevo Fernandez. I first met Juan Gabriel in 2012 when my aunt Claudia sent me to his store to buy chips and sodas. I had no idea he identified as *homosexual*, though.

My aunt Claudia also introduced me to her neighbor Téo. When I first met Téo, he disclosed to me that he was 25 years old and identified as Gay. He has lived in *Nuevo Fernandez* all of his life, but periodically spends a few weeks living in *Tenochtitlan* with his partner. When I told him about the project, he became ecstatic. Subsequently, when I told my cousin Liz about this project, she introduced me to her friend Chavelo. Chavelo was the shyest of all the contributors. We spoke briefly during our first encounter, and he revealed to me that he was 18 years of age and was from a nearby rancho called *La Yerba* (pseudonym). At the time of his interview, Chavelo had just graduated high school and was studying to become a business leader.

After meeting Chavelo, I reconnected with my friend Jack-Watson. I first met him during the 2013 *Nuevo Fernandez* annual *fiestas patrias*.¹² He was from *La Milpilla* and was rumored to sleep with men around the time I met (according to my cousin Adrian who is from the same ranch). At the time, he did not have many friends because of those rumors. He expressed interest to be part of the project over a video chat *Plática*. At the time of the interview, he was 25 years old and was still living with his family in *La Milpilla* (pseudonym). Though he identified as *heterosexual* in 2013, he now accepted his attraction to men. When I asked him how he identifies he stated, “*mas o menos les digo que soy.*” Meaning that he more or less communicates to other men that he has interest for them without actually subscribing to an identity label.

Drawing from the *pláticas* I had with Alex, Trevi, Juan Gabriel, Neto, Jack-Watson, Chavelo, Ricky, Ignacio, Daniel, and Téo and the literature, I constructed themes of resistance strategies to answer my research question, RQ1 (listed in the results table below). I have listed these resistance methods as in-text citations (RS) next to each theme as I unpacked them in narrative form (just in case they overlapped).

(See Results Table)

¹² Yearly festivities

Resistance Strategies Against Hegemonic Rhetoric (RS)

Through this project, my collaborators and I articulated a variety of resistance methods contemporarily deployed in the rural. Methods that stem through centuries of resistance to repression, cruel punishments, pathologization, imposed virility, and nationalist exclusion. These resistance methods are a response to the perverse logic of coloniality and its interlaced hierarchies (Grosfoguel, 2005). These resistance methods (RS)¹³ include resistance through enclaves (RS1); Subversive Complicity (RS2); and Disidentification (RS3).

Resistance through Enclaves (RS1)

Gruzinski (2003), stated that many *Jotería Rural* in the 17th century colonial period were able to navigate because of the organization of enclaves. The tradition of *Jotería Rural* standing in solidarity despite the repressive societal norms has been a resistance method that has transcended the sands of time. Contemporarily, many of the *Jotería Rural* I spoke to testified that they organize enclaves as a support system. These enclaves are shaped around their shared experiences of marginalization. Neto shared with me that there was a group of *Jotería Rural* that formed as means to resist through visibility:

Cuando yo estaba en mi adolescencia nos juntábamos un grupito de gays. Grande, porque éramos unos 16. Era bien padre porque de allí nos empezábamos a dar valor entre todos como ya éramos muchos. De allí nos empezamos a apoyar y sentirnos como no estábamos solos y nos juntábamos en una esquina. Era bien padre, pero se deshizo el grupo. Yo me fui a GDL y empezó a ver pleitos entre ellos y eso se acabó. Pero igual esa etapa sirvió para que también la gente viera porque aquí en Tenochtitlan nunca se había visto antes de eso que salieran libremente siendo gay vistiéndote distintos a los demás.¹⁴ (RS1 & R3)

¹³ I will be using these acronyms as in-text citations to label some of the resistance strategies that emerged from the *Platicas*.

¹⁴ When I was in my teenage years, I would hang out with a group of gays. It was big because there was 16 of us. It was awesome because we started to give value to one another because there was many of us. From there we started to support on another and felt like we were not alone. We used to hang out in a corner. It was awesome, but the group disbanded. I left to Guadalajara and there began to be problems between them. Still, that was a mark in the history of Tenochtitlan because never before had open, gays been so visible with attire different from the regular town folks.

Ricky agrees that visibility through enclaves is one of the reasons *Jotería Rural* are more widely accepted in *Tenochtitlan* contemporarily. “*Ya es normal [ser gay] aquí en Tenochtitlan. Eso del tema gay ya era normal. Antes nos juntábamos 13 y andábamos de cuadra a cuadra todos así y andábamos de un lado para otro,*”¹⁵ Ricky said (RS1).

Subversive Complicity

Grosfoguel (2005) defines subversive complicity as re-signifying what the west has imposed upon the world through the development of alternatives modern/Eurocentric/colonial world system. It is a way of survival through participation. Neto argued that *Jotería Rural* from previous generations developed a *jotería ranchera*¹⁶ identity. Subversive complicity also involves negotiating one’s identity to specific situations, environments, and contexts. It is essentially a way of navigating. Ricky addressed that his identity by knowing where to *jotear*. He emphasized that he refrains from *joteando* in other people’s homes. Especially when he is unsure if those individuals are accepting. He argues that every *Jotería Rural* in *el rancho* should *saber donde y cuando jotear*¹⁷:

Cuando me accidenté me hice muy vulnerable y inseguro. Si no lo hice antes [vestirme], ahora menos. Si payaseo y todo y todos andamos en tacones y mi mama viéndonos y todo aquí en la casa en lo privado, pero ya en si de grande no lo aria. Ósea soy gay, so le que me gusta, pero nunca he tratado de ser una mujer ni quería ser mujer.... Osea tenemos que saber equilibrar y saber donde jotear. Para mi es la palabra adecuada HAY QUE SABER DONDE JOTEAR. Por ejemplo, si tu me invitas a tu casa, yo no voy a llegar joteando. Yo no voy a llegar torcida con tacones. Hay que saber comportar. Si llegamos con [nuestro amigo] Amanda, allí si podemos decir ‘hay chula.’¹⁸ (R2 & R3)

¹⁵ It is normal to be gay in Tenochtitlan now. The topic of being gay was already normal. Before 13 of us would hang out and were visible from block to block.

¹⁶ Ranch Gay identity

¹⁷ Know when and where to “gay out.” Joteando is a way of subverting to imposed, heteronormative norms and prescribed gender roles. An example of this can be a cis man wearing heels or makeup.

¹⁸ When I got into an accident, I became super vulnerable and insecure. If I did not do it before (drag), I would not do it now. I do mess around and everything and sometimes we [my friends and I] all are in high heels while my mom is watching us everything

One of the most compelling and complex narratives disclosed to me was the way Ricky navigates considering his intersectional identity of being *Joto*, *afeminado*¹⁹, and *discapacitado*.²⁰ In our *platica*, we covered an array of topics such as his disability as a pathway to familial acceptance; his experience with MEWCCCUS gays in both cosmopolitan and rural spaces; his internal struggle with body politics within the LGBTQIA+ community; experiences with discrimination; and perseverance:

Tienen que pasar a huevo las cosas para agarrar mas. Por ejemplo, yo me accidenté, perdí me mano y eso. A baso de eso [mi familia y yo] nos unimos mas... hubo mas comunicación. Desde entonces, yo mismo lo dije... Si tuviera que pasar otra cosa así otra vez, por ejemplo, perder mi otra mano, para estar bien, para estar unidos como hermanos, lo volvería hacer. Después de mi accidente, todo se fue acomodando. Salía con mi papa, mis hermanos, y todos a gusto. Tengo muy buena relación hasta ahorita. Cualquier cosa que me pase, yo tengo la confianza de decirles. De hecho, mi mama tiene la confianza de decirme, 'mira fijate mijo que vi a un muchacho bien guapo para ti.' Hasta me da mas vergüenza a mi y le digo 'hay ma ya cállate la boca.' Pasan muchas cosas a una persona mocha. Cambia tu mentalidad y punto de vista. Si me perjudico porque mi misma cabecita me hice creer que 'nadie te va querer porque estas mocho.' Igual hay muchos hombres que son bien materialistas, enfocados en los cuerpos y con eso me traume. Ósea, nadie me decía, '¡mira hay va el mocho! Son puras cosas que yo me metía a la cabeza. Hasta que cambia mi chip de eso, quizás voy a cambiar.

Al año y medio entre a trabajar lo básico. Después empecé a tener broncas porque el encargado del negocio decía que no servía para nada. También me dijo, 'tu no sirves, eres diferente.' Yo le dije... '¡Yo

here at home in private, but in public at a big event [like the beauty pageant], I would not do it. In fact, I am gay, I know what I like, but I have never tried nor ever wanted to be a woman... we have to know how to keep equilibrium. Know how where to gay out. For me it is the proper saying for this context KNOW WHERE TO GAY OUT. For example, if you invite me to your house, I would not come gaying out. I would not get there all twisted with high heels. We have to learn how to behave. If we go to [my gay friend] Erick's house, we can gay out and say "hey girl."

¹⁹ Effeminate

²⁰ Disabled

soy igual que tu, hasta puedo ser mejor que tu! No te descuides porque hasta puedo terminar en tu puesto y la verdad te lo prometo.’ Ya cuando te falta una parte de tu cuerpo, ya nomas estas buscando como lo haces. En mi caso, pos empecé de ceros mi vida cambio. El encargado mi traía para un lado a otro, pero así con una mano le sacaba el trabajo. Ahorita bendito dios se como amararme las cintas, se cortarme las uñas. Se hacer muchas cosas. Mi mama me quería traer como uno cuando se pone malo [chiqueado]. Me quiera bañar y todo y le decía, ‘¡déjame!’ Ella me contestaba ‘¡no quiero que te lastimes.’ Yo le dije ‘Déjame tropezarme a mi mismo para que yo mismo me levante y me enseñe. Nunca me vas a dejar ser. Si faltas tu dios no lo quiera, que va ser de mi? Yo tengo que valerme por mi mismo.’ Ahorita a 5 años de me accidente, siento que estoy bien adaptado a la sociedad. Yo siento que lo puedo hacer todo, agusto la verdad. Tengo mucha fuerza de voluntad y autoestima. Yo mismo no me dejo caer.²¹ (RS2)

²¹ Things have to happen forcibly sometimes to gain more. For example, I got into an accident, and lost my arm. As a result, our family became closer... there was more communication. Since then I said, if something catastrophic like this, for instance, losing my other arm, has to happen again to be in good standing and to be united with my siblings, I would do it again. After my accident, everything started to fall into place. I would go out with my dad, my siblings, and everything was very comfortable. I have a good relationship up until now with them. Everything that happens, I have the confidence to tell them. In fact, my mom has the confidence to tell me, “look son, I saw a handsome guy just right for you.” Sometimes I get embarrassed and say, “Oh my god mom shut up.” There are so many things that happen to a cut person. Your mentality changes and your point of view. It messed me up because in my own mind, I made myself believe that “nobody would like me because I was cut.” Even so, there are many men who are materialists, focused on bodies and with that I got traumatized. Nobody would tell me, “Look here comes the cut one!” They were just things I would put in my head. I then changed my chip and said that I would change. A year and a half later, I returned to work. I then started to have problems because the owner would say that I was worth nothing. He also told me, “You are not worth anything, you are different.” I told him... “I am just like you, and I could even be better than you! Do not let your guard down because I could end up taking your place and honestly that is a promise.” The owner would have me from one place to another, but I still got the job done. Now thank god, I know how to tie my shoes and cut my nails. I know how to do many things. My mom wanted to have me like one gets when they get sick [spoiled]. She wanted to bathe me and everything and I would tell her, “leave me.” She would respond, “I do not want you to hurt yourself.” I told her, “Let me trip on myself so I can learn how to sand up on my own. You will never let me be. If you are no longer

Though some contributors engaged in subversive complicity tactics, others chose outright refusal by disidentifying.

Disidentification (RS3)

Muñoz defines disidentification as a “survival strategy evoked by the minority spectator to resist socially prescribed patterns of identification” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 28). It is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Chavelo and Jack Watson both disidentify because they refuse to identify themselves using global labels of identification. They essentially refuse narrow, static, and fixed minority labels prescribed by liberal multicultural discourses which white-wash complexities of intersectionality (Muñoz, 1999, Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, Chavelo state that “*nomas me gustan los hombres*”²² whilst Jack Watson said that “*mas o menos les digo que soy*”²³ (RS3)

Téo and Juan Gabriel argued that they disidentify with global, cosmopolitan aesthetics by dressing in the aesthetic of *el joto de rancho*.²⁴ Juan Gabriel described to me what this aesthetic looks like. “*Aquí en el rancho pues yo nos enseñaron a tener chores, gorra, botas, pantalones. El buen vestir. Una buena texana. Así me gustaba, pero cuando era joven y bello. Ahora me vale [como me visto] jaja*,”²⁵ Juan Gabriel stated (RS1 & RS3). Téo also dresses in cowboy boots, lavish belts with barn animal designs, and leather jackets. In essence, they disidentified by taking components from dominant cultures and reconfiguring them into their own *Jotería de Rancho* aesthetic.

As another means of disidentification, many of the contributors also transformed cultural logic from within by removing their hegemonic interlockings and highlighting multiplicity (Muñoz, 1999). In essence, they implemented multiple disidentifications towards multiple sites simultaneously.

here, god forbid, what will be of me? I have to value myself.” Now, 5 years after my accident, I feel like I am adapting to society. I feel like I can do everything comfortably honestly. I have much strength of will and self-esteem. I do not let myself fall.

²² I just like men.

²³ I more or less tell them what I am.

²⁴ Gay of the ranch

²⁵ Here in the ranch, they taught us to use shorts, hats, boots, pants. The great way of dressing. A good Texas cowboy hat. That is how I liked it when I was young and beautiful, now I do not give a shit how I dress haha.

Some of these sites and/or fronts of resistance include globalism/modernity, neoliberalism, and imposed virility (derived from the logic of coloniality). They did this by not fully identifying with and subscribing to (and working on and against) globalism/modernity, neoliberalism, and virility. Instead, the *Jotería Rural* I spoke with identified their third space where they took the non-hegemonic, liberating, multiplicity, and intersectional meanings of all three to mold their identities to create a *joteria ranchera*²⁶ and *Joteria de pueblo*²⁷ (Bhaba). This is similar to Dussel's Transmodernity theory which states that we must take also take from the non-hegemonic moments of modernity.

Alex and Trevi embodied this *joteria ranchera* when they described their identities to me. One dimension of their identity that makes them unique is their love for their community's local culture. Specifically, their pleasure for *corridos* and *banda*. *Corridos* and *banda bailes* are some the rituals of manhood linked to performance of virility. Every year in the fiesta of *Nuevo Fernandez*, men utilize *los bailes* as a platform to showcase their virility with how well versed they dance this genre of music. They do this through the mastery of the speed, versatility, and leadership of the movements. This is also a way for *bugas*²⁸ to communicate romantic and/or sexual interest towards a potential female partner (with the exception of when *bugas* ask their family members to dance). Every year, I am galvanized by how Alex and Trevi outperform their *buga* counterparts on the dance floor. “*Asi de jotos como nos vez les ponemos la muestra,*”²⁹ Trevi stated (RS3).

Another dimension of *Jotería Rural* dis-identification in *Nuevo Fernandez* is the reclaiming of the *joto/maricon/effeminate* male identity derived from the events of the dance of the 41 (Chavez, 2018; Capistran, 2018). This is done in private by those who seek to retain *respeto* as social capital, but in public by those who openly subvert to *respeto* (Noriega, 2014). Like *La Cotita de incarnation* disidentified with colonial constructs and visions of identification, Alex and Trevi disidentify with their performance of *hombre afeminado* and *vestida*. They do this by transgressing the imposed gender regime. Trevi suggested that he feels liberated when *se viste*³⁰. In

²⁶ Ranch gayness

²⁷ Town gayness

²⁸ Vernacular in Mexican Gay and Joto culture in reference to hetero folks.

²⁹ Being gay, we show the how it is done.

³⁰ Dresses like a woman

fact, he proudly goes out into public with clothing an attitude of *una mujer empoderada*³¹ (RS9). He emphasized that he is the same person in private as he is in public:

Pos al igual yo cuando vi que me gustaban los tacones y los vestidos dije bueno, ¿si a mi me gustan, a la gente que? [me vale lo que piensan]. Yo me sentía liberada en como yo me vestía a como me visto y usar tacón y eso y nunca me ando fijando en que dirá la gente mucho menos sus opiniones. Pues al igual de mi en las comodidades, yo me siento agusto de una forma de otra. No le pongo pretexto a una forma o la otra (masc o femme). Si salgo vestido de mujer es igual que salga vestido de hombre y pues si la gente se te queda mirando raro y equis cosa, pero es mejor que te miren nomas una vez para verte cualquier vez [que se acostumbren]. Yo en la casa y en la calle soy igual soy el mismo, digo el mismo vocabulario, soy el mismo. Trato igual al las persona. Mas que nada no escondo en la calle lo que soy aquí en la casa. Soy igual aquí y afuera.³² (RS9)

Like Trevi, Alex also feels confident being the same person in both the private and public spheres. While preforming down the runway of Trevi's living room in stylish red heels, Alex shared that *se viste*³³ to "mess around" and only does it in private spaces:

Si de primer si [me daba pena usar ropa de mujer], pero después agarras confiansita y te vale madre (at this point of the platica Alex starts snapping his fingers) y allí andas putiando agusto con tacón y todo. (puts on tacones at this point of the platica) Pues a mi no me importa lo que dirá la gente. Hay que darles de comer un gatito para que tengan de que hablar. La genta es una estúpida y me da lo mismo (starts

³¹ An empowered woman

³² Well, when I found out I liked high heels and dresses, I said, "If I like them, who cares what people think." I felt liberated in the way I dressed and how I dress and using high heels and I am never looking at what people think or their opinions. I feel comfortable on way or another. I do not fit the fold of masc or femme. If I go out dressed as a woman, it is the same thing as I were to go out dresses as a man. Yes, the people do look at you funny, but it is better that they see you so that they can get used to it. I am in the same in the street as I am at home. I use the same vocabulary; I am the same. I treat people the same. More than anything, I do not hide what I am when I am at home. I am the same inside and out.

³³ Dresses up

performing and walking with tacones). A mi las dos cosas me gusta ser (femenino y masculino). Como pa vestirme de mujer me gusta para payasear pero para andar en publico no me gustaría.³⁴ (RS1 & RS3)

Juan Gabriel also articulated that *se viste* only in private. He also shared that he only did so in public when he briefly lived in the United States. “*A mi me encantaba vestirme de vieja cuando vivía en estados unidos. Hasta tenía mas de 90 pelucas, pelucas hermosas de 500 tantos dólares. ¡Hacia pista vestido grande! No chingaderas. Pero me gusta el desmadre,*”³⁵ he revealed (RS3).

Conclusion

It is clear that MEWCCUS have done little to recognize the experiences of *Jotería Rural* in queer scholarship. I proposed the inclusion of *Jotería Rural* in rural southern Mexico to shed light on the discourses that are escaping the MEWCCUS eye. The main discourse of this project was on the resistance strategies *Jotería Rural* have implemented to combat the hegemonic ideologies that stem from the perverse logic of coloniality (Fanon, 1955). The root of these restrictions in the rural stem from hegemonic ideologies derived from coloniality and exclusionist nation building. I found that similar resistance methods implemented by *Jotería Rural* throughout history such as resistance through enclaves; subversive complicity; and disidentification. These resistance strategies continue to be implemented in response to hegemonic rhetoric. Further, these unique resistance strategies can help us understand the diverse responses to coloniality. Particularly, from subaltern communities such as *Jotería Rural* who face unique challenges in peripheral spaces. Additionally, these resistance tactics demonstrate that *Jotería* is not a monolithic or homogenous identity or experience. On the contrary, *Jotería* can be manifested in diverse ways that do not always universally align with metronormativity.

³⁴ At first [I was embarrassed to use women’s clothing, but afterwards I started to get confidence and I did not give a shit (snaps) and there you are hoeing around comfortable with high heels and everything. (puts on the high heels at his point of the platica). Well, I do not care what people think. Let’s give them a cat to eat so they can have something to talk about. People are stupid and I don’t care (starts performing walking with the high heels). I like to be both femme and masc. To dress like a woman, I like to do it just to mess around, but I would not do it in public.

³⁵ I used to love to dress like a woman when I was in the United States. I used to have more than 90 wigs, beautiful wigs worth more than 500 dollars. I used to go down the runway with a big dress. I love the craziness.

Clearly, *Jotería Rural* continue to transform their communities with their own methods of resistance. Methods that should be honored and celebrated. ¡*Qué viva la Jotería Ranchera!* ¡*Qué viva la Jotería de pueblo!*



Table 1

Research Questions (RQ):

RQ 1: How do the identities of *Jotería Rural* resist despite the repressive ideologies and the dehumanizing and punishing acts that derive from Mexican historical moments?

Resistance Strategies against hegemonic rhetoric in the rural

Resistance Strategies (RS)	Examples
RS1) Resistance through enclaves	1) Belonging to social groups and club.
RS2) Subversive Complicity	2) Dressing in traditional rancharo style, speech patterns, vernaculars, body language. Acting in ways that appear to be assimilation, but to enable further transgression through invisibility or masking.
RS3) Disidentification	3) Dressing in traditional rancharo style, speech patterns, vernaculars, body language.

References

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands: La frontera*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books.
- Baker, K. (2011). Conceptualizing rural queerness and its challenges for the politics of visibility. *Platforum*, 12, 38-56.
- Bell, D. (2000). Naked as nature intended. *Body and Society*, 6 (3-4), 127-140.
- Bell, D. & Valentine, G. (1995). Queer country: Rural lesbian and gay lives. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11 (2), 113-122.
- Capistran, M. (2018). Un Dia Como Hoy Mas De Ciento. In M. K. Schuessler & M. Capistran (Eds.), *Mexico Se Escribe Con Jota*. Mexico City, MX: Editorial Planeta Mexicana.
- Carrier, J. (1995). *De los otros: Intimacy and Homosexuality Among Mexican Men*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Chavez, J. (2018). Afeminados, Hombrecitos, y lagartijos Narativa Mexicana del siglo XIX. In M. K. Schuessler & M. Capistran (Eds.), *Mexico Se Escribe Con Jota*. Mexico City, MX: Editorial Planeta Mexicana.
- Conlisk-Gallegos, L. (2018). Somos la dignidad rebelde: On Mexican Indigenous praxis of resistance pedagogy, no longer misappropriated under US “innovative” methods. *Journal of Latinos and Education*.
- Crenshaw, K. (1995). “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color”. In: *Martha Albertson Fineman, Rixanne Mykitiuk, Eds. The Public Nature of Private Violence*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 93-118.
- Dussel, E. (1993). Eurocentrism and modernity. *Boundary*, 25(3), 65-76.
- Dussel, E. (2012). Transmodernity and interculturality: An interpretation from the perspective of philosophy of liberation. *Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1 (3), 28-55.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fierros, C., & Delgado-Bernal, D. (2016). Vamos a platicar: The contours of platicas as Chicana/Latina feminist methodology. *The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*, 15(2), 98-121.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2005). Hybridity and Mestizaje: Sincretism or subversive complicity? Subalternity from the perspective of the coloniality of power. In A. Isfahani-Mammond (Ed.), *The masters and the slaves: Plantation Relations and mestizaje in American imaginaries* (pp. 115–129). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Gruzinski, S. (2003). The Ashes of Desire: Homosexuality in Mid-Seventeenth-Century New Spain. In P. Sigal (Eds.), *Infamous desire: Male homosexuality in colonial Latin America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gutierrez-Perez, R. (2022). *Joteria* Communication Studies. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Hames-Garcia, M. (2011). *Gay Latino Studies: A critical reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Kazyak, E. (2011). Disrupting cultural selves: Constructing gay and lesbian identities in rural locales. *Qual Social*, 34, 561-581.
- Lozano-Verduzco, I. (2015). Desire, emotions, and identity of gay men in Mexico City. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, 16 (4), 448-458.
- Moraga, C. (2020). *Theories of the flesh: Latinx and latin american feminisms, transformation, and resistance*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Muñoz, J. (1999). *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and Performance Politics*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Noriega, G. (2014). *Just between us: An ethnography of male identity and intimacy in rural communities of northern Mexico*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press.
- Prieur, A. (1998). *Mema's house, Mexico City: On transvestites, queens, and machos*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Quijano, A., & Ennis, M. (2000). Coloniality of power, eurocentrism, and Latin America. *Neplanta Views from the South*, 1 (3), 553-580.
- Ruvalcaba, H. (2016). *Translating the queer body politics and transnational conversations*. England: Zed Books.
- Schuessler, M. (2018). Una Macana de Dos Filos. In M. K. Schuessler & M. Capistran (Eds.), *Mexico Se Escribe Con Jota*. Mexico City, MX: Editorial Planeta Mexicana.
- Spivak, G. (2010). *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

“Queer Novela:” Storytelling about *Latinidad*, Healing, and Resistance

María Céleri

Abstract

This article examines Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s drag repertoire, in particular their “Queer Novela” project—a YouTube web series in which the two drag performers reenact stories sent to them by community members to reframe queer and trans Latinx representations in mainstream media. Based on a cultural analysis of their performance repertoire and an extensive interview with the performers, I demonstrate that drag and *latinidad* are synonymous with each other through storytelling, cultural performance, and resistance. The work they engage in is intentionally political and grounded on both expanding *and* challenging a hegemonic and nationalistic framing of *latinidad*. I explore the following questions: What is *latinidad* within the confines of ongoing heterosexist patriarchy? How does cultural drag reframe heterosexist and nationalist definitions of *latinidad*? What is the role of storytelling in drag and Latinx culture and how does it function as a form of healing and resistance?

Keywords: cultural drag; *latinidad*; storytelling; healing; resistance

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Raquel Ita and Barbie Q for sharing their stories and art with me and the world. I would also like to thank Daphne Taylor-García and PJ Di Pietro for reading earlier versions of this manuscript and for their invaluable feedback and support.

On December 12, 2017, C.R.E.A. (Consciencia Rebelde en Acción) and SD QTPoC (San Diego Queer Trans People of Color) Colectivo—two autonomous community-oriented organizations in San Diego, California, met with David Favela, the owner of Border X and Carmen Velasco, events coordinator of the Latinx brewery located in Barrio Logan, San Diego. Border X is not just a Latinx-owned brewery in Barrio Logan, a historically Mexican/Chicanx neighborhood in southern San Diego—they are a Mexican craft beer brewery that is known for hosting cultural community events such as Chicano-Con. The meeting was organized by Mujeres de Maiz, C.R.E.A., and SD QTPoC Colectivo to discuss an event that was supposed to take place in Border X on November 10, 2017, in which the Cuban feminist queer duo *Krudas Cubensi* would be performing at their venue. Border X canceled the event just weeks before the 10th when Favela and Velasco were made aware that the opening act would be Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, two local Latinx drag queen performers.¹ Having worked previously with Border X, the organizers were confused by the cancelation. The abrupt cancelation not only left the organizers scrambling to find a new venue and correct their advertisements but the homo- and trans-phobic response opened a larger debate surrounding *latinidad*, especially when one of the reasons offered was that drag was not culturally appropriate. Border X changed their reasons behind the cancelation throughout their interactions with the organizers from claiming that drag was not culturally appropriate, especially for a “family-friendly” locale to asserting that they did not allow lip-syncing, only live performances; later stating that the venue could not accommodate dancing and/or they did not have a license for dancing; and lastly, there was a lack of communication between Border X and the organizers.

The interactions between the organizers, performers, and Border X sparked an important conversation around *latinidad*, in relation to its boundedness and inclusion, or lack thereof of drag performance and *jotería*. Who gets to define the boundaries of *latinidad*? And where do queer/*cuir*/trans/*jotxs* fall into the category? The organizers’ interactions with Favela and Velasco after their cancelation of drag from the line-up help frame my analysis of Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s performance projects as these relate to cultural drag (Arroyo, 2002) and define queerness, storytelling, and performance as a healing practice within the bounds of *latinidad*. Here, I follow Latinx queer

¹ Throughout the article I will use Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s stage names for their protection and will use she/her/her pronouns per their request to respect the gender they embody while in drag.

scholars on performativity such as Juana María Rodríguez (2003), Ramón H. Rivera-Servera (2012), José Esteban Muñoz (2020), and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2021) to demonstrate how Latinx drag, as a form of cultural performance of *latinidad*, challenges homogenous ethnic definitions of the term and consider the embodied and affective relations that fall outside of normativity, heterosexuality, and whiteness and which are fundamental to a Latinx identity politic. In the following article, I provide an in-depth analysis of Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s “Queer Novela” project—first released on YouTube as a web series and scheduled to debut as an on-stage performance at Border X back in 2017—and argue that it demonstrates the important role that drag has always played in Latinx communities as a form of storytelling, healing, and resistance. My reflections, analysis of “Queer Novela,” and personal interviews with Raquel Ita and Barbie Q inform this article and expand an ongoing conversation around *latinidad*, belonging, and community in the face of anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant rhetoric nationwide. Unlike Favela’s request that we unite to fight the “real monsters on the streets and in the government offices” (2017), I fervently demand that we unite in a critical conversation about who gets left out when we name Latina/o/x as an ethnically unifying identity politic.

Border X’s actions further legitimized longstanding heterosexist and nationalist parameters of *latinidad*, specifically anti-Latinx and homo-/transphobic responses to drag that hinge on the belief that drag is oversexualized and not appropriate for children. Furthermore, through their actions, Border X defines *latinidad* as that which is not drag, that which is not gender non-conforming, and that which is not queer. The questions that arise from this incident and from an analysis of Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s performance repertoire, which will be examined in this article are: what is *latinidad* within the confines of ongoing heterosexist patriarchy? In what ways does cultural drag reframe heterosexist and nationalist definitions of *latinidad*? And what is the role of storytelling in drag and Latinx culture and how does it function as a form and healing and resistance?

I met Raquel Ita and Barbie Q during the organizing of the November 10th event as one of the co-founders of SD QTPoC Colectivo. The Colectivo was formed in 2016 by a group of friends who wanted to put together an art show by and for queer and trans people of color to fill the void that is often felt by the white cis gay male presence in spaces like Hillcrest—San Diego’s “gayborhood.” The first art show, “Queers Dismantling Borders,” was so well attended that the organizers, including myself, realized that our community

was in desperate need of events like the art show. The Colectivo was formed out of necessity and was forged out of friendship and love. I write my analysis from a semi-autobiographical perspective because it is important for activists of color, especially queer activists of color, to reflect on how they work within their communities to engage in critical conversations around queerness, belonging, and resistance.

The following article is based on in-depth interviews with Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, as well as a feminist cultural analysis of their performances, in particular their web series “Queer Novela.” As their performance repertoire reveals, drag and *latinidad* are synonymous with each other, through the storytelling of cultural performances. The work that they engage in is intentionally political and grounded on both expanding *and* challenging a hegemonic and nationalistic framing of *latinidad*. One of the most pernicious frameworks from which Border X was responding was that *latinidad* does *not* equate to drag and vice versa. Legitimizing a heterosexist *machista* concept of *latinidad*, their response reified longstanding beliefs about what it means to be Latinx and what it means to belong within the larger U.S. context, where Latinx people are minoritized for their ethnic background and/or immigration status, but whose heterogeneity outside of these confines establishes a norm of belonging.

Latinidad as an identity project gains its roots in a complex history of (internalized) colonization, *mestizaje*, and *blanqueamiento*, as well as through forced migration and assimilation (Pelaez Lopez, 2018). In other words, *latinidad* as a U.S.-based identity project that unites Latin-American and Caribbean descendants has often been used to coalesce a particular type of Latina/o. In the process, many Latinx people who are not read as Latina/o are relegated to the margins. For example, Indigenous peoples, particularly those who do not speak Spanish as a native language, and Black/Afro-descendants are marginalized both in their home countries and within the U.S. as “Latinos” (Pelaez Lopez, 2018). Queer, non-binary, and gender non-conforming Latinx peoples’ sexual and gender identities are often read as a consequence of their “Americanization” and not respected as a powerful tool of resistance against colonial cis-heteropatriarchy (Pelaez Lopez, 2018).

My critiques of *latinidad* are not new or radical. Frances R. Aparicio (2019) provides us with a rich and complex genealogy of the term in *Negotiating Latinidad*, from how *latinidad* has been critiqued for being a homogenizing U.S.-based project to how it has been redeemed as a site of heterogenous

potential and inclusivity. Yet, the critiques around homogenizing versions of *latinidad* continue to be more relevant than ever before, especially considering the escalating attacks against Black communities, immigrants, refugees, and trans peoples by Trump’s administration. Rather than imagine a false unity among struggles, where we compromise in the name of “fighting the real monsters out there,” I urge that we recognize our differences to work together to demand a world that understands our differences and needs. There is space to reconceptualize *latinidad(es)* and unite under its banner if it is an anti-racist, decolonial political project committed to the liberation of Indigenous, Black, and Brown peoples; the repatriation of land and resources; and the decolonization of social norms like the binary system of sex and gender.

José Esteban Muñoz reminds us that it is not possible to know *latinidad* for “Latino does not subscribe to a common racial, class, gender or sex orientation” Rather *latinidad*, Muñoz explains, is a structure of feeling that is performed rather than a fixed notion of ethnicity (2020, p. 8-9). Performance is that which allows *latinidad* to extend past and against whiteness, heteronormativity, normative citizenship, and propriety (Muñoz, 2020, p. 11). He focuses on the moments of affective excess performance that characterizes *latinidad* as a constant negotiation with the social—this relational definition of *latinidad* that happens in the space of the performative is a useful way to consider how Raquel Ita and Barbie Q negotiate their cultural drag performances and their Latinx identity inside and outside the bar scene.

Raquel Ita and Barbie Q Cancel the Bar Scene and Redefine Drag

Raquel Ita and Barbie Q are two local drag performers from San Diego, California who have been performing since 2012. While they both began their career with a drag group that performed in the city’s gay-bar scene, tensions with the group led them to leave and transition into performing in Latinx community spaces geared towards social justice organizing. They have performed in art shows, fundraisers, and all-ages community spaces. Discussing their exit from the gay-bar scene, Raquel Ita explains that performing in bars felt “pointless” and “limiting” in terms of their audience. On the other hand, performing in all-ages Latinx community spaces allowed them to “create new dialogues or my hope was to kind of spark conversations within families and within Latino communities that we normally wouldn’t have” (Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, 2021). For example, their performances at Border Angels, a local non-profit organization that works on migrant death-prevention work at the U.S.-Mexico border, show the way drag is more than an act of entertainment

but can function as a form of activism and does indeed open up spaces of/ for dialogue, which is what I will demonstrate Raquel Ita and Barbie Q are actively doing in terms of creating spaces to rethink *latinidad* in relation to *jotería*.

Their transition out of the bar also led them to begin “Queer Novela” in 2017, which is a YouTube web series that shares stories about queer and trans Latinx peoples. The series is inspired by “Mujer, Casos de la Vida Real,” a Mexican television show that aired between 1985-2017, and which captivated the public with its reenactment of real women’s stories around controversial topics such as domestic violence, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and abortion, among other issues that were not readily represented on network television at the time. For “Queer Novela,” community members send in their stories, and Raquel Ita and Barbie Q write, direct, and edit short reenactments of the accounts. The goal of the project, Raquel Ita explains, was to “have a space to be able to share our own stories...[since] the mainstream media wasn’t showing our stories, and so we felt like we wanted to continue showing more stories about the Latino X community” (Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, 2021).

Barbie Q explains that “for me, drag has always been about the telling of stories” and that storytelling has always been a part of Latinx culture and a part of how Latinx peoples pass down cultural practices, rituals, and narratives (Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, 2021). As an immigrant queer subject, she connected to and learned about her family, ancestral knowledge, and Mexican culture through storytelling. Storytelling is an expansive tool of meaning-making and community-building that can take many shapes and forms—*novelas*, *chisme*, *arte*—and for Raquel Ita, drag is the vessel through which to convey emotions and that can lead to paths of healing. For both performers, drag has facilitated physical and emotional healing for it physically uses the body in creative ways, while at the same time, helping to heal from childhood trauma caused by *machismo*. Barbie Q explains that growing up, she was not able to express herself and explore what it meant to be queer. The stage name Barbie Q is an ode to her younger self who was not allowed to play with Barbie dolls. She explains that “Barbie Q is a healing tool for all the *machismo* I learned growing up...Barbie Q is my own doll. Every time I dress up, I feel like I am able to unlearn those *machismos*” (Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, 2021).

The incident with Border X was not the first or last homo- and the transphobic backlash they have experienced from within the Latinx community they are a part of and have helped cultivate throughout their career. Most recently,

in September 2019, they experienced a heightened and violent response when they were hired to perform during story time at their local library in Chula Vista, San Diego. Both educators and dedicated to critical pedagogy, they maintained their commitment to perform even after “pro-family” religious groups like Mass Resistance ran an anti-drag campaign to pressure both the library and the Chula Vista mayor Mary Casillas Salas to cancel the event.

The support for “Drag Queen Storytime” was so overwhelming that the library had to change the event to a larger venue to accommodate the outpour of RSVPs. Furthermore, the media attention resulted in the two artists participating in a short documentary film, *Las Reinas de los Cuentos* (Detwiler, 2021), which details the backlash and response to the event. Chula Vista, a predominantly Latinx neighborhood in southern San Diego, just under fifteen miles from the U.S.-Mexico border, responded with support, attended the event alongside their families and children, and demanded that mayor Salas support the event. In an interview before the event, Barbie Q states, “Sexuality and drag are two different things...Drag is art—an art that is not necessarily done for somebody who belongs to the LGBT community. I think misinformation is in regards to that: not being able to separate art from sexuality” (Rawles, 2019). Indeed, drag serves multiple functions: entertainment, art, parody, storytelling, activism, and resistance, just to name a few modes of redefinition.

Drag performances have the power to unravel the fictive cohesiveness of heteronormative gender and sexuality is a considerable enough threat to hegemonic structures that depend on the hierarchical binary system of sex and gender for sexual and economic capitalist exploitation. Undoubtedly, it is a significant enough threat that the response to that drag is not part of the dominant hegemonic culture (Anglo, Latinx, etc.) and/or it is against “family values.” But drag is more than a challenge to heteronormative gender and sexuality. In *Translocas*, La Fountain Stokes explains that drag “challenges hetero-, homo-, and transformative gender narratives” as “the simplest level” of subversion (2021, pg. 4). Drag is also a threat because it represents a break of allegiance with the normative and transforms into a choice of redefining meaning outside of the protection of the state (La Fountain-Stokes, 2021, pg. 18). The latter points to one of the biggest sites of tension between drag and *latinidad*, which is Latino as an identity has historically sought the acceptance of the U.S. nation-state through narratives of the “good and hard-working immigrant” as well as the “light-brown *mestizo*” subject worthy of rights and protection. Ramón H. Rivera-Servera explains that the latter depends on the reproductive heterosexual family unit for which queerness stands as a threat (2012, pg. 17).

Latinx drag performers invalidate this normative narrative and foreground how *latinidad* has always necessitated a trans-optic to strategically navigate the Anglo-U.S. nation-state. In his study of *translocas* in contemporary Puerto Rican *travestismo*, La Fountain-Stokes defines “trans” not as that which is unstable or in-between, but rather “...as the core of transformation—change, the power or ability to mold, reorganize, reconstruct, construct—and of longitude: the transcontinental, transatlantic, but also transversal (oblique and not direct)” (2021, p. 19-20). I argue that *latinidad* is an identity, a community, an affective sense of belonging, and a mode of embodiment that gets remade at the level of the structural and the discursive. What Latinx drag performers do is make visible the fact that *latinidad* is both something that can be defined—by language, culture, and other commonalities, as well as something that is ever-changing and cannot be demarcated—through embodiment, affective responses, and a sense belonging. Like queer performance scholars such as Juana María Rodríguez (2003), Ramón H. Rivera-Servera (2012), José Esteban Muñoz (2020), and Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes (2021), I contend that queer performance challenges *latinidad* as a cohesive identity category invested in heteronormative *mestizaje* and the nation-state as well as allows for the possibility of imagining moments of identification and community-building.

It is a myth that Latin American and Latinx cultures are homogenous heterosexist *machista* cultures that do not welcome *jotería*, queer, gender non-conforming, and drag performers. Here, I follow the foundational work of decolonial feminist Latin American/Latinx scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones, and Cherríe Moraga who remind us that the binary sex/gender system, which normalizes binary sex, gender, and heterosexual desires is a Western colonial imposition that was merely inherited by postcolonial subjects that have internalized their colonial oppression. Lugones, in “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” argues that the colonialist project “Emphasize categorical, dichotomous, hierarchical logic as central to modern, colonial, capitalist thinking about race, gender, and sexuality” (2010, p. 742). In other words, Lugones (2010) asserts that colonial modernity is structured through hierarchical dichotomies to establish social relations of power, which justified the reduction of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) knowledge and practices to the status of non-human, within an ideological system that equates humanity to civilization. Furthermore, she demonstrates that in various Indigenous communities both in the Americas and Africa, the concept

of an inequitable gender binary did not exist before European colonization; further, she explicates that the disruption of all social, spiritual, and economic structures was part of the colonial project (Lugones, 2008).

Disruptions to the binary sex/gender system have always existed if albeit its subjects are economically, politically, and socially marginalized. At the same time, timeless entertainment figures like Walter Mercado, Juan Gabriel, and Carmelita Tropicana who have escalated to international fame are also a reminder of the ways that queerness, gender non-conformity, and drag play a crucial role in the quotidian lives of Latinx peoples across the diaspora. The late Walter Mercado engaged in his camp performance as an oracle for an average of 120 million viewers a day on the Latinx TV news program *Primer Impacto* on Univisión from the mid-1990s to 2010. Performance studies scholar, Diana Taylor asks “How does [Walter Mercado] get away with this camp performance...considering the show targets a broad range of middle- and working-class audiences across the Americas?” (2003, p. 113). According to Taylor, it is in part because oracle workers, soothsayers, *espiritistas*, and shamans hold “special authority” in Latinx cultures—an influence that has remained strong despite the power of the Catholic Church (2003, p. 114). At the same time, Mercado’s camp performance is not like other *espiritistas* who often rely on performances of “untouched” Indigenous/Native traditions. Mercado not only performs queer/camp flamboyance, but he also performs whiteness and high-class (Hedrick, 2013, p. 199-203). His robes are reminiscent of the extravagance of Valentino Liberace and such extravagance, according to Taylor, helps Mercado transcend to super-human or otherworldly (Taylor, 2003, p. 120).

While Mercado’s popularity, fame, and success can be accredited to many things, including the viewers’ faith in oracle workers, his extravagance performance of super-human prowess, his performance of cultured whiteness, and/or the fact that he has never explicitly claimed queerness/homosexuality, I suggest that his acceptance is also due to how non-normative sex/gender has always been an essential part of the Latin American/Latinx cultural make-up even when these relationships with non-normativity are *not* articulated. This is not to insinuate that Latin American/Latinx *machista* and heterosexual violence against queer/trans and other LGBTQ+ peoples is not a reality because the material circumstances of non-normative sex/gender/sexualities are dire. Rather, in the tradition of unspoken acceptance of otherness in Latinx communities, queerness has always co-existed even if in silence (Sifuentes-Jauregui, 2014, p. 3-4). That is, the Anglo “coming out” narrative has not

always translated to Latinx cultures, in which queerness exists without having to explicitly claim it. Rather, there is a myriad of ways of *entender* [knowing] gender/sexual transgression instead of being (Smith and Bergmann, eds., 1995, p. 11-12). As Hedrick states in her analysis of Mercado's strategic use of queer Oriental capital branding, "Mercado's queer sexuality is an open secret" (2003, p. 182). I include an analysis of Mercado's queer performance not as a comparison to cultural drag—Mercado's performance must be credited to his success in neoliberal cultural branding—but rather to demonstrate how *jotería* co-exists in the quotidian practices of Latinx households becoming a part of generations of children and families the same way as *telenovelas*.

Mainstream Disruptions: The Potential of Cultural Drag in "Queer Novela"

"Queer Novela" currently consists of two episodes because, as Raquel Ita explains, writing, directing, producing, and funding film projects while having full-time jobs outside of their drag careers has made it difficult for them to have consistent episodes air. But with the advent of social media video platforms like TikTok, they hope to move their project to make shorter videos that reach wider audiences. In the trailer, released on September 7, 2017, Raquel Ita and Barbie Q describe "Queer Novela" as a collaborative project that exemplifies the stories of the queer and trans Latinx community in mainstream media to be heard, seen, and represented (Queer Novela). Episodes consist of stories about violence and sexual assault as well as hope and finding ways to reclaim humanity in the face of violence. While it dramatizes the stories in the style of a *telenovela* and showcases Latinx/Chicanx symbols like a Selena outfit, Día de los Muertos, cumbia music, and more, it also represents the stories of the Latinx queer and trans diaspora not seen on mainstream television or *telenovelas* until more recently.

I understand "Queer Novela's" drag performance in the series as what Josianna Arroyo calls "cultural drag," which she defines as "...similar to other drag in its uses of the feminine as a vehicle for representing identity. At the same time, however, it constitutes itself as the 'performance' of other cultural, sociopolitical, and subjective orders such as race, class, gender and sexuality" (2002, p. 156). "Queer Novela's" disruptive potential is in the challenge to representation or lack thereof in the Latinx mainstream media. Limited to the representation of white queerness such as Walter Mercado, the Latinx mainstream media does little in the realm of representation of genderqueer,

gender non-conforming, trans, or drag peoples. *Telenovelas*, the most popular form of entertainment in Latinx households are relegated to rags-to-riches stories with white Latinx actors from all ethnic backgrounds. “Queer Novela” is a direct response to this limited form of representation.

Furthermore, “Queer Novela” defies the victimization of queer and trans characters when they are represented on media platforms, whether they are portrayed as tragic victims of their circumstances, rather than depict the myriad realities in which they exist. The episode “Queer Qatrina,” written and directed by Barbie Q and released on November 11, 2017, interprets the return of the spirit of Qatrina to the world of the living on Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead). Dressed in an all-black flowing dress with a multi-skull headdress, the spirit of Qatrina, a drag queen from the world of the dead appears from the ocean late at night while “La Llorona” plays in the background. The scene cuts to the front porch of a house where a group of friends builds an altar for Día de los Muertos. Amid *chisme* (gossip), laughter, and cumbia music they carefully place *cempasúchil* (marigold) flowers in vases around pictures of Latinx trans people that have passed—specifically Flo Floé, Giovanni Melton, and Stephanie Montez. As they finish, they gather to talk about the importance of taking the time to remember moments of happiness and celebrate life. They talk about the reality of violence, especially for queer and trans people of color, as well as their ability to reclaim humanity even amid extreme violence. They proceed to enter the home to dance and celebrate, to be joined by the spirit of Qatrina.

The altar is a celebration of that life, of queer and trans people of color’s humanity, and how the ancestors continue to guide the path of future generations. The act of staging the altar is also a performance of a specific type of *latinidad*, one that is both specifically Mexican/Chicanx and acts against it. The family that makes up the living and the dead in this episode are chosen family members coming together through a forged queer community in San Diego. The episode “Queer Qatrina” is an homage to the queer and trans ancestors that guide our path and who have given their lives so that we may ours more freely. Barbie Q explains that the episode was born out of a need to honor the queer ancestors that guided them, like their drag mother Flo Floé who introduced them to the drag scene in San Diego when they were just starting their performance career, at a time when the weight of queer and trans murders was heightened (Raquel Ita and Barbie Q, 2021). “Queer Qatrina” challenges the heteronormative view of *familia* that traditional Día de los Muertos altars often uphold. The episode extends the definition of family to a queer chosen

family made up of ancestors that forged the Latinx drag world in San Diego. Día de los Muertos is the one day of the year that our dead ancestors join the living in celebration. It is indeed a celebration of them and their legacy. For queer and trans people of color who have often lived difficult lives and/or died in tragic circumstances and at the hands of the state, “Queer Qatrina” honors the beauty of survival and defiance, rather than the victimization that often gets represented on screen.

The episode is also an homage to the cultural practices that Mexican/Chicanx/Latinx people have as an act of resistance to the Catholic imposition during colonization, the Anglicization of Latinx cultures in the U.S., and the threat of (capitalist) reappropriation. Calavera Catrina, now popularized by candy skeletons and decorative skeleton face paint during Día de los Muertos celebrations, was first created by artist, illustrator, and satirist José Guadalupe Posada in the 1910s as a satirical caricature of the Mexican upper-class during Porfirio Díaz’ dictatorial reign. Catrina is dressed in an elaborate aristocratic gown and hat, smiling while clutching to her riches, even after death. Her popularity came from her darkly humoristic symbolization of vanity and greed. Originally named Calavera Garbancera, she represented the Mexican white *mestizo* upper-class who rejected their Indigenous background. Now she guides the dead to the netherworld while creating a bridge to connect the living to the dead. How Catrina has been sanitized, popularized, and packaged for consumption shows the depoliticized ways that culture can serve to homogenize identity. Just as Catrina serves as a satire of the wealthy class, clinging on to their wealth as a symbol of national belonging, Queer Qatrina serves as a satire of the heteronormative Latino community, clinging on to their normative binary gender roles.

Qatrina, the drag queen of the dead, appears on screen in the popular Mexican folksong “La Llorona” interpreted since the nineteenth century by Mexican artists such as Chavela Vargas and Lila Downs and popularized by films such as *Frida* (Taymor, 2002) and *Coco* (Unkrich and Molina, 2017). The rich history of the song itself, which is an oral folk narrative passed down orally from generation to generation reminds us of the power of oral traditions, for Latinx peoples who use stories, legends, song, *chisme*, and drag to transmit narratives and knowledge outside of the traditional written word. The legend of La Llorona dates to pre-Columbian time, where Aztec legend has it that the goddess Cihuacóael (woman serpent) appeared at night crying for her dead children (Alonso-Minutti, 2020, p. 54). Different versions of the legend claim that La Llorona drowned her illegitimate children after discovering that her

male lover had betrayed her. Other versions of the tale say that her lover was a Spaniard, and they could not be together because she was Indigenous. While other versions claim that she killed her children because her lover threatened to take them away from her. Condemned for killing her children, she spends eternity crying for them.

In Mexican and Chicana folklore, La Llorona serves multiple functions, but often, her story serves a disciplinary function to regulate children’s mobility and female sexuality. While often used to frighten children from playing near water unattended or alone at night, she is also used to teach young women a lesson about proper womanhood. In *Chicana Sexuality and Gender*, Debra J. Blake recounts an interview with a Chicana who remembers being told that La Llorona killed her children because she could not afford to raise them without a husband or male figure in the household (2008, p. 149). Sometimes judged for her actions and at best victimized for being abandoned by her husband/lover, La Llorona is a national symbol of failed woman/motherhood.

At the same time, Chicana feminist scholars and artists have recuperated the figure of La Llorona as a feminist icon or as “...an agent of transformation or as a means of liberation for women, but the most radical repositionings involve abandoning traditional elements of the lore or changing the outcome to challenge its social conventions and the dominating forces at work in it: forces most often cited as heterosexual Mexicanos and Chicanos, Catholicism, and other patriarchal institutions” (Pérez, 2008, p. 72). As Blake explains, these narratives challenge and disrupt mainstream Mexican, Chicana, and U.S. heteronormativity and the status quo while at the same time elevating the figure of La Llorona to the status of a powerful goddess (2008, p. 161-184).

In “Queer Novela,” Queer Qatrina appears as Queer Llorona—a woman serpent from the water underworld singing in celebration, not crying in desperation. Queer Qatrina is a “radical repositioning” that “challenges social conventions” (Blake, 2008, p. 72). She appears not because she is condemned by the patriarchal world that punishes her for infanticide, but because her queer children are alive and need her. Rather than being a figure to be feared, her queerness is summoned and welcomed inside the home. Her entrance into the home reverses the homophobic narrative in which queer youth are exiled from the home for their deviant desires. At the end of the episode, queerness and *latinidad* rejoice as one to the sound of cumbia music and warm embraces. The

queer potential of Qatrina in this episode not only challenges the heterosexist representation of the figure of La Llorona as failed womanhood but also expands our understanding of family/tradition and survival/resistance through storytelling.

I focus on the episode “Queer Qatrina” because it performs aspects of *latinidad* in Mexican/Chicanx culture through a queer narrative that is about life as much as it is about death; is about resilience as much as it is about pain; is about *latinidad* as much as it speaks against a Latinx community that often siloes its *jotx* members. The work that Raquel Ita and Barbie Q accomplish here is creating queer Latinx stories for other queer Latinx people, amidst the many instances in which they are effaced. Through storytelling and performance, they begin to heal the wound of misremembering that has been caused by a settler colonial white framing of *latinidad* that we need to continue to work against.

Conclusion: Jotería as Medicina

Back in 2017, Favela’s asserted that our collectives’ response to call Border X out for their behavior was divisive given the anti-Latinx and anti-immigrant stance of Trump’s presidency and that “Now is not the time to drive wedges between our communities” (Favela, 2017). I understand Favela’s cry for “latino unity” to come from a particularly narrow understanding of *latinidad*, and one which cannot imagine identities as always already malleable and ephemeral. Favela’s comments are not the first time that LGBTQ+ people have been called divisive by their racial/ethnic communities, especially in social justice organizing contexts (Blackwell, 2011). The accusation that we were being divisive assumes that there exists a pre-established hierarchy of oppression that must be attended to by the Latinx community that places issues of gender, sexuality, and representation last over xenophobia. Rather, we wanted to demonstrate that the hierarchization of oppression has historically relegated the most vulnerable communities to afterthoughts of organizing, rather than as the most important cornerstones of organizing.

My analysis of Raquel Ita’s and Barbie Q’s cultural drag repertoire, in particular, “Queer Qatrina,” which I analyze in depth in this article, serves to demonstrate the role that performance, drag, and *jotería* play in thinking through the expanse of *latinidades*. Cultural drag, for the performers, was a necessary transformation to help heal from ostracization, *machismo*, and the violence of white cis heteropatriarchy. Their work, as a result, is about

belonging, resistance, and healing. Furthermore, I demonstrated that drag and performance have always played a fundamental role in how Latinx people understand culture and center belonging. Like Muñoz, I am interested in thinking through a Latinx identity politic that is structured on feeling, relationality, and difference.

References

- Alonso-Minutti, Ana R. "Chavela's *Frida*: Decolonial Performativity of the Queer Llorona" in *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*. Ed. Jes Ramos-Kittrell. (UK and Lanham, MD: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2020). 47-76.
- Arroyo, Josianna. "'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall': Performing Racial and Gender Identities in Javier Cardona's 'You Don't Look Like'" in *The State of Latino Theatre in the United States: Hybridity, Transculturation, and Identity*. Ed. Luis A. Ramos-García. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002). 152-171.
- Blackwell, Maylei. *Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011).
- Blake, Debra J. "Cultural Anxieties and Truths: Gender, Nationalism, and La Llorona Retellings" in *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History and Art*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2008). 144-184.
- Favela, David. Email correspondence. (November 5, 2017).
- Hedrick, Tace. "Neoliberalism and Orientalism in Puerto Rico: Walter Mercado's Queer Spiritual Capital" in *Centro Journal* 25.1 (Spring 2013): 180-209.
- LaFountain-Stokes, Lawrence. *Translocas: The Politics of Puerto Rican Drag and Trans Performance*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2021).
- Lugones, María. "The Coloniality of Gender" in *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*. (Spring 2008): 1-17.
- . "Toward a Decolonial Feminism" in *Hypatia* 25.4 (Fall 2010): 742-759.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Feeling Brown: Ethnicity and Affect in Ricardo Bracho's *The Sweetest Hangover (and other STDs)*," in *The Sense of Brown*. Ed. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020). 8-23.
- Pelaez Lopez, Alan. "The X in Latinx is a Wound, Not a Trend." *Color Bloq* (September 2018). Web. <https://www.colorbloq.org/article/the-x-in-latinx-is-a-wound-not-a-trend>
- Pérez, Domino Renee. *There was a Woman: La Llorona from Folklore to Popular Culture*. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press 2008).

- Queer Novela. “Queer Novela Trailer Oficial,” YouTube Video, 2:48, September 7, 2017, <https://youtu.be/lpmyPK8gHhE>
- . “Episode 2, Queer Qatrina,” YouTube Video, 9:46, November 11, 2017, <https://youtu.be/-XGSNiflqIw>
- Raquel Ita and Barbie Q. Personal interview. (January 15, 2021).
- Rawles, Timothy. “Exclusive: Meet the Queens Reading for Drag Queen Storytime in Chula Vista,” in *SDGLN* (August 31, 2019).
- Sifuentes-Jauregui, Ben. *The Avowal of Difference: Queer Latino American Narratives*. (New York: SUNY Press, 2014).
- Smith, Paul Julian and Emilie L. Bergmann, eds. “Introduction” in *¿Entiendes? Queer Readings, Hispanic Writings* (Durham and London: Duke University Press 1995). 1-14.
- Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press 2003).

Queering Traditional Cultural Values like a Chicana/x Feminist

Pico del Hierro-Villa

Abstract

Queer Chicana Feminists have been at the foreground of creating counter-movements and narratives to challenge hegemonic ideologies, like heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, that have affected the way Mexican/Chicanx culture has represented women. In this essay I provide a short genealogy and theoretical framework through Chela Sandoval's terms "oppositional consciousness" and "meta-ideologizing" to show how Chicana feminists have created post-narratives through writing and art. Through these post-narratives, cultural iconographies, like La Virgin and Malinche, that function based on colonial patriarchy have been challenged making room for liberation and autonomy through reinterpretation. With this, I then pull from Chicana Feminists' efforts in creating an artistic methodology to continue the work of Chicana, and now Chicanx Feminism, by including a Queer Chicanx perspective into not only liberating but Queering cultural iconographies.

Keywords: Oppositional consciousness, Meta-ideologizing, Iconographies, Heteronormativity, Hegemonic Masculinity

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the Chicana Feminists who have made a great impact in my life. Whether through writing or in-person interaction, my work and political consciousness would not be the same without you all.

Introduction

Queer Chicana Feminists have been at the foreground of creating counter-movements and narratives to challenge Western ideologies by exposing the violence they have inflicted upon communities through heteronormative forces and the pressure to abide to the status quo. As history has progressed these oppositional endeavors have created different outlets of expressing resistance towards violent western standards like hegemonic masculinity, binary gender roles, and hetero supremacy over Queer identities. In this essay I will be utilizing two of Chela Sandoval's ideological terms to present the framework Queer Chicana Feminists have used in both their writing and art that further reflects the deconstruction of hegemonic power. The first one being oppositional consciousness which Sandoval describes as the "mapping of consciousness in opposition to the dominant social order which charts the white and hegemonic feminist histories of consciousness..." (Sandoval, 1991, p. 11) Oppositional consciousness has become a prime model in Chicana Feminist work thus creating outlets that have deconstructed traditional heteronormative values in the Chicana community.

The second ideological structure I will be employing is Sandoval's definition of meta-ideologizing to represent how Chicana Feminists have restructured cultural iconographies to create new concepts and stories about women in our culture. Sandoval describes meta-ideologizing as "the operation of appropriating dominant ideological forms and using them whole in order to transform their meanings into a new, imposed, and revolutionary concept." (Sandoval, 1994, p. 78) I show that with Queer Chicana Feminist work I have been able to create different approaches to display and confront Queer Chicana struggles like machismo and homophobia through an intersectional lens that includes, gender, race and sexuality in my art which challenges Chicano traditional cultural values. Moreover, I will be presenting the historical trauma that motivated Queer Chicana feminist work through these three components, 1. The Chicano's movement monolithic strategy for Chicana@ liberation, 2. How heteronormativity has created hegemonic power and 3. How colonization has implemented toxic traditional values about women into our culture.

As a Queer Chicana Feminist artist I have always found it necessary to incorporate the "self" and politic identity into the work I do. I recall as a child always being surrounded by creative influences like my dad and uncles who introduced me to the surrealist artist Salvador Dali and the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. I was intrigued by their technique but wasn't invested into them

as artists. It wasn't until my aunt brought out a knock off painting, she bought from El Bronco swap meet called "Los Dos Fridas", *The Two Fridas*, painted by a Mexican artist named Frida Kahlo. Frida Kahlo was a disabled Queer communist who exhibited her intersectional identity into her paintings that presented an artistic mode I found to be most interesting. (Danielli, 2018) Her style of painting represented the ethos of colonized women that created a background story of pain but uplifted the resistance and strength learned through suffering. Frida Kahlo was an example of placing background and the personal into art that acted as a counter-method of male and white colonial dominance. As I grew older and became familiar with Chicana Feminism and Chicana Feminist art, I carried my work with more intent to counter act against negative performances of hegemony. Like Frida, I wanted to not only create but also recreate the stories of women and femmes within the Mexican/Chican@/x community building on the resilience to the static pictures of suffering. I wanted my art to represent more than a basic cultural representation, but something additional that was continuously in the making and that was presenting healthy feminist practices and ideologies. With doing so, it was also important to recognize the framework of Chicana Feminist literature and art to honor their work and efforts in providing this critical material.

The Chicana movement

In the 1960's a movement sparked an oppositional stance against the U.S. which functioned as an empire that targeted racialized minorities and inflicted them into the violence of a police state and more. The mobilization of intergenerational Mexican Americans and Mexican-Immigrants led to what we know now as the Chicano movement. Chican@s were viewed as invisible minorities who struggled to obtain functioning education systems and everyday living conditions. From Los Angeles to Chicago, where there was a heavy presence of Chican@s and Mexican Immigrants, oppressed peoples decided to take matters into their own hands and a political struggle that fought for various issues like farm workers' rights, anti-assimilation, exploitation and police brutality evolved. As the movement progressed Chican@s formed a sense of unity which they called "La Raza Unida", a brotherhood and sisterhood that was an important factor for trust in movement building, but ended up creating a pluralistic lens that soon made Queer Chicanxs and Chicanas leave, making a new renaissance of ideologies and tactics flourish in the field of feminism. (Montejano, 2010, pp. 1-6)

Women in the movement were expected to work in roles that were considered to be piddling and subordinate to the men doing front line work. When Chicanas presented issues that were impacting the women in the movement, many traditional Chican@s pushed back saying it wasn't part of their core beliefs and would damage the focus of fighting for everyone's struggles and not just one sub-group. While the women's movement was gaining momentum around the same time, Chicanas began to critique the ways they were being treated and challenged the white heteronormative framework fueling their oppressions. In 1969 at a Chicano Youth conference in Denver, the Chicana caucus reported "the Chicana Woman does not want to be liberated." It was a rejection to the white woman's liberation movement and a statement for Chicanas trying to organize towards gender equality and Queer rights. A year later at the Raza Unida Convergence Chicanas took the stage to advocate for equal representation where they were called "Vendidas" *traitors to the movement* and were asked to leave. (Montejano, 2010, pp. 151-152)

As Chicana Feminists started to disperse from the movement to enter into different political strategies and modes of production that encompassed women's struggles, once more they were challenged with homogeneity. The Women's Liberation movement, also known as the second wave of feminism, was a white restrictive space in that it focused primarily on the binary of Men vs. Women. Women of Color's struggles were thrown into a multicultural understanding of race, creating no room for a broader intersectional lens on race, class and gender. White women's sisterhood, like Chican@s La Raza Unida, became another issue and only allowed for women in these organizing spaces to focus on "women's issues" which were primarily impacting white women. (Sandoval, 1991, pp. 4-5) It wasn't until the late 1970's to early 80's when "This Bridge Called my Back", "Mixquiahuala Letters" and more Queer Chicana literature was being published was when multiple manifestos became accessible to start leading Chicanas into a direction that was specifically constructed for their intersectional political beliefs.

Heteronormativity as the pillar of hegemonic power

Chicanas who took the route of feminism were said to be anti-family because they were seen as trying to destroy the heterosexual and patriarchal structure that placed them under men and being subjected to traditional labor-focused work. (Montejano, 2010, p. 151) The idea and practice of heterosexuality has deeply affected the structure of gender roles within the Latinx culture. Heterosexuality in the context of Queer Theory is not classified

as merely an identifier of sexual preference but rather a way of thinking and doing known as Heteronormativity. Heteronormativity in the U.S. has been structured through hegemonic regimes constructing everyday violence and submission. Heteronormativity specifically when it acts as hegemonic power works to keep social order and norms that reflect the average nuclear family, including “Having a job that occupies the main part of our lifetime, getting married to someone of the opposite sex, considering sexuality as private, affirming the existence of prisons as useful institutions.” (Varela, 2011, p. 69), all displaying heteronormativity as hegemonic power.

Connell’s and Messerschmidt’s (2005) further explain how domination functions through heteronormativity in “Hegemonic Masculinities” by presenting the concept of hierarchal masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity, which originally began with the violence that was inflicted on gay men through homophobia, is considered to be the utilization of power to exert dominance over women and can only be attained by Cisgender heterosexual white males with socio-economic capital. As working-class men and men of color wanted to gain access to hegemonic masculinity, in which I believe to reap the benefits of white supremacy, protesting masculinity, a form of hegemonic masculinity without the benefits of economic resources and institutional authority formed in disenfranchised communities. Specifically, in the Chicano community protesting masculinity has taken the form of machismo. The performance of machismo sustains sexist and violent actions that are imposed upon all non-men, creating a hyperfeminine (p. 848) and hypermasculine dichotomy that feeds into the patriarchal order. This is what affected Chicanas in the movement during the 60’s and what Chicanas are still facing.

Chicana literature & art as counter-hegemonic tools

The claiming of the Chicana body and the determination of her functionality is a byproduct of colonialism. Women’s autonomy in Chicano culture is a concept that has deep roots in how colonizers have asserted their superiority (Cordova, 1998, p. 79) through the Catholic religion. The secular response to women’s actions has created a binary of both good and evil, two constraining paths that only allow women to seek motherhood or a life of adultery and sin. A duality is created of appropriate functions that are linked to La Virgen de Guadalupe and non-appropriate functions that are linked to Malintzin, now known as Malinche. This particular action has constrained the way Chicano/Mexican culture and values can allow women and femmes to flourish and work outside of these binaries that function only to create

submissive roles. Chicanas have long struggled with the identification through these two, La Virgin and Malinche, cultural iconographies because it destined their paths, pressuring and leaving them with no ability to seek beyond the virgin and whore narratives. As we saw with the Chicano movement, Chicanas were destined for servitude to the Catholic religion and their men. As time and struggles passed many Chicanas were not satisfied with the historical violence and war on women and femmes' bodies, so they created a new struggle, art forms and renaissance of literature that paved the way for Chicana sexual liberation and autonomy. The binary of La Virgin and Malinche were now being challenged, critiqued and analyzed to provide counter hegemonic tools to Chicana and Chicana feminist praxis allowing us to leave behind the narratives that were holding many back and showed how these cultural icons can become reinterpreted through literature and art.

The first femme who fell victim to andro-centric and colonial violence was the mother goddess Tonantzin. In 1513, a colonized Indigenous man, whose Spanish name was Juan Diego, saw a woman appear on the hill of Tepeyac. Before the Spanish conquest Tepeyac was a site for ancient pilgrimages where several earth deities, including Tonantzin, resided. The woman that Juan Diego saw became known as La Virgin de Guadalupe. Originally having dark skin and non-European features, La Virgin's image was transformed into having olive skin and black hair with a humble gesture that reflected the churches image of "the native population the Spanish sought to control" (Peterson, 1992, pp. 39-40). 1519 was the arrival of the Spanish empire in present day Mexico, connecting Hernan Cortes, a Spanish Conquistador, and Malintzin, a noble daughter of the Aztecs who was sold into Mayan slavery after her father's death. (Romo, 2005, p. 140) She then helped translate for Cortes leading to the fall of the Aztec empire. In present times, La Virgin and Malinche have forcibly taken the role of a positive and negative duality.

In the article "Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism" by Norma Alarcon, she analyzes the duality of both La Virgin and Malinche along with including the work of Octavio Paz and Chicana Feminists who have created a reinterpretation for their original meanings. As stated, La Virgin and Malinche are placed into the two confining roles of what women and femmes should strive to achieve and try to avoid. La Virgins' role falls into the maternal realm while Malinche falls into the category of disloyalty and whoredom. She was "viewed as the originator of the Mexican people's fall from grace and the procreator of a "fallen" people." (1989, p. 58) Malinche was reflected as a whore and traitor because she accompanied

Hernan Cortes through the Aztec empire translating the indigenous Nahuatl language to European Spanish. Malinche was also a woman who spoke through independence that contrasted the maternal role. The maternal role simply states that women's obligations are to bare children and stay under the order of men, not speaking for oneself.

In "The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Mexico", Octavio Paz's argues about eradicating our historical knowledge of Malinche by creating a neo-myth. Paz also mentions Malinche and Cortez are more than historical figures but also a symbolization of our living attitude of how we create standards for both men and women in our culture through his misogynist writing. Paz then recreates the idea of Malinche by announcing her as the founding mother only through her feminine conditions of being passive and a representation of maternity who has suffered. (1985) Paz's argument analyzes the misogyny and response to masculine visualizations of women historically and in present time. Malinche represents the overall attitude that is held in the Chicano/Mexican culture towards women in any moment, whether they are independent of a situation or victims. Chicanos tend to side with male nationalistic values when it comes to Malinche, placing their favoritism with La Virgin de Guadalupe who is a symbol of silence. If we analyze the representation of La Virgin, we can point out many attributes that reflect how women are perceived within the Chicano culture. As mentioned previously, Chicanas during the movement faced toxic situations of being silenced and being labeled as *venidadas* and even Malinches for deviating away from traditional culture practices. These Chicanas were going against the representation of subversion and becoming victims of moments they could not control. Chicanas felt a direct conflict of having to fulfil these traditional roles and functions. It was creating barriers with their "creativity and inventiveness, as well as with their desire to transform their cultural roles and redefine themselves in accordance with their experience and vision.". Chicanas as creative vessels and political representatives have deconstructed the duality of La Virgin and Malinche by creating speaking subjects with their reappropriations. (Alarcon, 1989, pp. 70-71) Traditional views of La Virgin and Malinche are being denied and envisioned through a feminist lens. Chicanas have taken a position that has disrupted this representation of this duality and reclaimed the ability to develop their personal embodiment.

Another article that mentions Chicana Feminist work as a counter-hegemonic tool is "La Malinche as Metaphor" by Tere Romo. Romo focuses on the five metaphors in which Malinche is interpreted and analyses the art

that creates unique placements of Malinche. Though Malinche is a historical figure Romo mentions she has become “code” for negative female attributes inspiring Chicanas to reinterpret her identity. (2005, p. 140) Chicana artists have made efforts to disrupt this by creating re-evaluations of Malinche as an on-going discourse of male subversion by turning her into personal symbolism of resistance. In the section “La Malinche as Chicana”, Chicana artist Carmen Lomas Garza created an offrenda to Malinche for Dia de los Muertos. Lomas Garza, another artist, pays tribute to the strong women in her life that has influenced her and Malinche on the alter represents how educated Chicanas and those who explain their cultures to others have become Malinches. (2005, p. 149) Lomas Garza’s tribute to Malinche creates a parallel of present-day struggles in the women/femme realm and Malinche by linking it to education and cultural giving. The focus on education relates to women straying away from cultural roles and the focus on sharing relates to the betrayal of Malinche translating the Nahuatl to Spanish. By enriching Malinches interpretation Lomas Garza is pushing her story forward and beyond the traditional tale.

Two specific Chicana feminist pieces that have personally influenced my ability to obtain a counter-hegemonic consciousness when it came to the self-direction of my desirability were Sandra Cisneros’s essay “Guadalupe the Sex Goddess” and Alma Lopez’s digital piece “Our Lady”. Both pieces have become a tool that reflects both oppositional consciousness and meta-ideologizing in that they both utilize traditional material to counter hegemonic power that dominates the Chicana in her sexuality and body by transforming the image of La Virgin into a liberated colonized woman.

In Cisneros’s essay she reflects on her encounters with shame that revolved around the negative associations she had towards her body and the lack of access of sex-positive rhetoric. She mentions how guilt is a major factor that has left young women with the inability to gain sexual confidence because of how Chicano culture is structured. Cisneros (1992) then provides a juxtaposition of La Virgin and how she represents the modest Chicana perspective.

“This is why I was angry for so many years every time I saw a la Virgen de Guadalupe, my culture’s role model for brown women like me. She was damn dangerous, an ideal so lofty and unrealistic it was laughable. Did boys have to aspire to be Jesus? I never saw any evi

dence of it. They were fornicating like rabbits while the Church ignored them and pointed us women toward our destiny—marriage and motherhood. The other alternative was putahood.” (p.48)

As she documents her growth in finding freedom through the action of self-love and sex, her perception of La Virgin changes as well. La Virgin de Guadalupe was now a mirror of the Aztec goddesses that represented putahood and resistance towards male dominance. “La Lupe as cabrona. Not silent and passive, but silently gathering force.” (1992, p. 49)

Lopez’s cyber art piece “Our Lady” was a part of one of the first digital art exhibitions nationwide and was featured at the Museum of International Folk art in Santa Fe, NM. Tey Marianna Nunn, the curator of Cyber Arte at MOIFA, recognized Lopez’s work and other Chicanas who were apart of the exhibition for their recast of traditional folx and cultural iconography that reflected twenty first century feminist values. “Our Lady” was a reformation of La Virgin of Guadalupe that represented the pre-colonial and present resistance of the Chicana. The piece consisted of a woman in a floral bikini being held by another women whose breasts were exposed, wearing a cloak with Mexica symbols. Three weeks after opening day of the Cyber Arte exhibit in Santa Fe, two males, a police Chaplin and community activist, along with others who were apart of the local religious community visited the museum to demand that Lopez’s piece be taken down immediately because it represented a “sacrilegious” and “offensive” image of La Virgin de Guadalupe. (Nunn, 2011, pp. 19-20) Alma Lopez’s work continued to cause a consistent uproar in many other religious communities for her reinterpretation of La Virgin and was eventually taken down at MOIFA.

Cisneros’s and Lopez’s pieces constitute the process of dismantling of the colonial framework that has placed hegemonic power over Chicana’s ability to produce assurance in their sexuality and their body. The representation of La Virgin has become the epitome of what women should achieve to be, a body that cannot be imagined with the abilities to reproduce unless the miracle of a man comes along. This image has placed a toxic vision upon the community perpetuating heteronormative standards for women who wish to be liberated. Both meta-ideologizing and oppositional consciousness has allowed for La Virgin and Malinche to become independent from the church allowing the ability to take on a form that is decolonized and autonomous.

Applying Chicana Feminism to my Artwork

About three years ago I wanted to revitalize my passion in doing creative work, so I started doing photography and digital collages. I saw that there was a need for Queer Chicana/Latina representation and wanted to provide something that was experimental and unconventional. When getting into photography I was inspired by the impact visual representation has on people. For instance, the emotional psychology that is triggered through images and how that can be used to create dialogue involving social change. I also wanted to combine different outlets of Queer ideologies, since they are typically provided through extensive and jargon literature that is Euro-focused and non-accessible. The way I approached my work was to provide some sort of conversation from the individual I was photographing. With every photo I took, I made sure to include a semi-structured interview or a small description of what the photo represented. I believe in providing accessible information that is critical to building solidarity and awareness for Queer and Trans communities of color by providing oral stories/information along with visual representation I access from the community. I also believe that focusing solely on the digressions of disenfranchised communities is harmful and that liberation, love and empowerment should be included in my artwork.

As for my digital collages, I took them as an opportunity to queer cultural iconographies or queer cultural icons like la Virgen and other cultural icons that hold deep meanings. Being that I am inspired by Chicana Feminist work, I wanted to take the concepts of oppositional consciousness and meta ideologizing further by incorporating a Queer/Trans/Non-Binary position into my work. With this, I include a range of genders to counter act against the idea of femininity and masculinity and who gets to claim it including the concept of mixing them together or the position of neutrality where the idea of gender does not exist, showing the process of decolonization through queering cultural identities and values. This position is also dedicated to the historical concept of gender pre-conquest. third gender people were recognized within many tribal communities and held at a high esteem (Miranda, 2010, p. 264), today there are still many third to fifth gender folks that exist all over the world but face many prejudice actions due to colonization incorporating the concept of the gender-binary. (Feinberg, 1996, p. 273)

My first piece, *Espiritualidad*, 2021., was a part of my *Espiritualidad* exhibit shown at the National Hispanic Cultural Museum. The purpose of the show was to display what spirituality looks like when it encounters the

Mexican and Chicax Queer identity when we start to divest from colonial secular values. I investigated what positive aspects can spirituality bring to Queer Mexicans and Chicaxs and how it can be found through connections with New Mexican land. The combination of photographs and testimonios was meant to act as post-narratives that focus on positive aspects due to the relation of religion and Queerness being seen as negative. This specific photo interprets Queer folks reconnection to spirituality and Bianca's new found connection with La Virgin that stands outside of the church. Bianca as a Queer women is the new reinterpretation of La Virgin, or Tonantzin, and what she stands for besides being a holy mother.

“I grew up Catholic, we would come to church and pray to the La Virgin de Guadalupe a lot and over time I started learning that La Virgin can be a separate entity. To be part of the church as they are now was just sort of a survival tactic. Later, I realized you don't have to be in the church to praise her, I started to pray to them at the Rio Grande, at my altar or wherever I could find her. It helped me get into touch with mother earth. For me this is a reclamation for my connection to La Virgin or in other words her Indigenous roots Tonantzin. I now have a space to be able to figure stuff out for myself instead of having to be connected through a church where I am made to feel bad. When you remove yourself from the church for reasons, I think a lot of the time what happens to people is that you also remove yourself from spirituality entirely. I think finding that you can still practice your spirituality is a process but important. I don't think everything is just all like black and white, there's more to everything. It's not just what you see, there's bigger things in that.”- Bianca (She/Her)



(Image: Espiritualidad,2021.)

My second piece, Henny, 2022., is from a series that I am currently working on titled *Chicanx Contrast: Queering La Cultura*. This project explores outside of the boundaries of Chican@ popular culture in that it breaks out of dominant cultural zones. When we create and consume Chican@ popular media and or culture it often becomes static in that we are typically only shown in certain circumstances and areas. I am in no way critiquing that the way we are shown is completely negative, but it does create a barrier for how we are seen as a community and for those who do not fall within these lines. With this I ask, can we consume the same media comfortably if we display Queer and Trans Chicanx folks in their own cultural boundaries and will they still be seen as valid parts of our community? I then reinterpret cultural standards and icons like Cholo/gang culture by placing a Queer perspective. This is not just a juxtaposition of Queer and non-queer Chicanxs or Mexicans engaging in the same actions but more of a take-over of the culture to imagine a future where Queer and Trans people can become validated and seen as culturally necessary as out Hetero and Cis counterparts are.

“I think it’s important for more inclusivity for a variety of reasons. I think it can be very life saving for those of us who do have overlapping identities. For those of us who are Queer and Trans, if there’s not enough representation in Chicanx spaces it teaches, particularly our young people, that these communities are not for them, that they’re a part of something that is seen as inherently “White.” We know that these experiences of being Queer and Trans in our communities are arguably as old as human experience. Folks who experience an intersection of marginalized identities are less likely to be given a proper platform to advocate for change. We see it when our Queer and/or Trans people, who are trying to address things like machismo that disenfranchise our feminine and non-men identified community members, are deprioritized to favor those with more privilege. We need to make more of a community wide effort to address the ways we uphold systems of oppression that have resulted in harm to our own people. So, taking some intentional strides to address why there are some harmful power dynamics that are at play within our communities, how they stem from systems like colonialism, like white supremacy, and other systems that have instilled harmful perspectives or practices within marginalized communities. Through addressing that, educating ourselves and other people, seeing the importance of inclusion, we’ll hopefully see the increase of equitable treatment and celebration of all our relatives.”- Henny (They/Them)



(Image: Henny, 2022.)

My last pieces are a digital collage that re-interprets Queer and Trans Latinx icons, Sylvia Rivera and Juan Gabriel, as La Virgen de Guadalupe. La Virgen is considered to be a sacred icon that provides protection, life and light to her devotees, but with the constriction of religion Queer and Trans folks are left without connection. I wanted to create a new interpretation to La Virgen through Queer and Trans icons that have provided visibility and care to the LGBTQ community. I also wanted to paint these icons as saints to provide Queer and Trans folks with the opportunity to create that connection with our Queer/Trans ancestors that have paved the way for our visibility. Sylvia Rivera was a revolutionary ancestor that was involved in the Stonewall riots and the founder of S.T.A.R. (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) that provided shelter and familial relations for unsheltered Trans youth. Juan Gabriel, though not out, exhibited his Queerness through his style and is considered to be one of the few Queer representations of popular Mexican culture. Though challenged with the constant inqueery of his sexual identity, he was still beloved by many in the community and worldwide. This helped set a tone for many Queer people in the Latinx culture struggling with their identity. These collages provide our ancestors with the sacredness and for the Queer community to pay their respects by providing that link back to religion and spirituality.



(Image: Trans is Sacred, 2021.)



(Image: Queer is Sacred, 2021.)

As a Queer Chicana Feminist artist I have always found it necessary to incorporate the “self” and politic identity into the work I do. With my art and photography, I hope to not only inspire but provide education to those who hold a malice attitude towards the Queer/Trans Chicana community. Situations of ignorance are often fueled by the lack of education and exposure to work that critiques the normative everyday life. As Chicana Feminism has pointed out, the idea of power over non-men has been instilled into us dating back to the conquest, meaning there is a heavy amount work and labor that needs to be put forward. I strongly believe that certain work that reflects the Chicana Feminist consciousness is necessary in the ongoing fight to liberating us from hegemonic power. Queer Chicana Feminists have created a methodology, as Sandoval calls it “methodology of the oppressed”, using the oppositional consciousness that deflects violent colonial standards that have long been inflicted onto the community in the past and present. (Sandoval,1991, p. 77) With a critical point of view, they have been able to adopt toxic traditional cultural values to reinvent them into ways that are palatable and functional within a colonized feminist framework. I hope to upkeep my art and photography and allow it to be fluid keeping up with the battle to expose hegemony. I also hope for my work to grow, being able to share it with others through publications and more.

References

- Alarcón, N. (1989). Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism . *Cultural Critique, No. 13, The Construction of Gender and Modes of Social Division*, 57-87.
- Cisneros, S. (1992). *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*. Princeton University Press.
- Cordova, T. (1998). Anti-Colonial Chicana Feminism. *New Political Science*, 379-397.
- DANIELLI. (2018, July 9). 21 Facts You Didn't Know About Queer, Feminist Icon Frida Kahlo.
- Feinberg, L. (1996). Transgender Warriors: Making History. In *Joan of Arc to Dennis Roadman* (pp. 272-278). Beacon Press.
- McClintock, J. M. (1991, October 6). Strutting macho male, 'under stress,' is no longer king of the roost in Mexico.
- Miranda, D. A. (2010). Extermination of the Joyas: Gendercide in Spanish California. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 253-284.
- Montejano, D. (2010). *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement*. University of Texas Press.
- Nunn, T. M. (2011). It's not about the Art in the Folk, It;s about the Folks in the Art. In A. G. Alma Lopez, *Our Lady of Controversy* (pp. 17-41). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Paz, O. (1985). *The Labyrinth of Solitude and The Other Mexico*. New York : Grove Press.
- Perez, E. (2012). Decolonial Border Queers: Case Studies of Chicana/o Lesbians, Gay Men and Transgender Folks in El Paso/ Juarez. In *Performing the US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (pp. 192-211). Indiana University Press.
- Peterson, J. F. (1992). The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation? *Art Journal* , 39-47.
- R. W. Connell, J. W. (2005). HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, 829-859.
- Romo, T. (2005). La Malinche as Metaphor. In R. H. Romero, *FEMINISM, NATION AND MYTH : LA MALINCHE* (pp. 139-152). Houston: Arte Público Press.
- Sandoval, C. (1991). U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World. *Genders*, 1-24.

Sandoval, C. (1994). RE-ENTERING CYBERSPACE: SCIENCES OF RESISTANCE. *JSTOR*, 75-93.

Tedman, G. (2009, May 2). The Family as Aesthetic State Apparatus.

Varela, M. d. (2011). Hegemony and heteronormativity: revisiting 'the political' in queer politics. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 27-31.

In the Tender Desert of Jotería: Reflections of Artistic Practice

Elaine Almeida

Abstract:

In this brief essay, I reflect on my practice as a queer illustrator by considering the interconnections of jotería and tenderness, utilizing the language of both to express the desires and goals of my work. Through this I begin to articulate a tender jotería care, and its potentiality for transformation and healing. I trace the blossoming of this work at the nexus of American deserts and the survival of sexual trauma, calling attention to this tender turn in my practice and jotería studies

Keywords: Tenderness, Care, Tender Joteria Care, Queer Illustrations

I aim not to simply disrupt, but to attend. Jotería is interested in the disruption of heavy hegemonies, instead blossoming through the uplifting and honoring of hybridities, a kaleidoscopic attention to each hidden and revealed part of the self. My interest in tenderness is about the sweetness and attending to these hybridities. To demand not just to be touched, but to be kissed, adored—totally and entirely.

I must start off and tell you that everything I am is a product of the stories around me. A mixed military brat of non-Latindigenous origin, I spent my childhood traveling from home to home, before finally spending nearly 10 years of my life in Texas. There, where the sun kisses rivers that race to the gulf, the stories and legends of those around me buried deep in my heart. Importantly, I am the product of secrets. Secrets about boys and crushes and girls and broken promises, and want. So much deep, deep want. When I think about who my work is for, it is for those who know distinctly, and no matter how secretly, how bad they *want*.

The heart of my work is a metaphysical desire for tenderness. What does it mean and how do we practice tenderness with ourselves and others? For folks who have been made minorities, how can tenderness help us not only imagine, but generate new futures? How can tenderness help us honor and kiss our pasts with a love we long thought gone? How can *I* be tender?

These are the questions that guide my scholarship, art, and purpose. And here, I ask us to consider how this tenderness is nestled in the heart of jotería studies.

In the dossier section of the Spring 2014 issue of *Aztlán: A Journal for Chicano Studies*, Michael Hames-García and the collection of authors map the contours of jotería studies through building upon a feminist foundation of the personal is political, the personal is powerful, (Hames-García 2014); they utilize their own romantic histories to spell out the place of focus. Jotería studies is as much about interpersonal romance experienced by queer chicana/o/e, and Latina/o/es, as it is about the romancing of the self/selves, and romancing of the ghosts and futures who cling upon them. Romancing can be budding, reconciling, or parting. In the year following the dossier, Robert Gutierrez-Perez's article "Disruptive Ambiguities: The Potentiality of Jotería Critique in Communication Studies," describes jotería's abilities as disruptive—Gutierrez-Perez utilizes jotería studies to think through disruption of norms and to better reflect the various nuanced, complicated, messy experiences of Latina/o/es (Gutierrez-Perez 2015). Together, jotería is described not just as a lens for a

specific subject (which sets it apart from a Queer of Color Critique,) but a lens for a set of questions one approaches the world. Jotería studies starts through the disruption of a hierarchical center and asks instead for us to engage with our own constellations of identities, with an attentive eye to the possibilities and particularities of the mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa 2012).

This engagement is where I find the blossom of tenderness. *Tenura*, tenderness, is described by philosopher Justin Clardy as an emotional disposition whereby “tenderness functions as a response to perceived vulnerability (Clardy 2019).” This thick definition orients us to tenderness’ possibilities—it is not a flashing emotion, but a disposition, a way one can learn to be in the world. This disposition then not only perceives vulnerability, but responds to it; it is aware, a *conocimiento* that is action-oriented to enact change—disrupt, Gutierrez-Perez might say. Vulnerability then, when in concert with a tender disposition, is not a sign of weakness, breaking, but of coming together, strength.

Thus when intimately tangled together, tender jotería care becomes a lens towards the questions of our connections. By care I mean systems of acknowledgement and action that transform. (Hobart and Kneese 2020; Tronto 2004). This can be emotional, spiritual, physical, communal. Hobart and Kneese, in their collection on radical care, reminds us that care is

“Theorized as an affective connective tissue between an inner self and an outer world, care constitutes a feeling with, rather than a feeling for, others. When mobilized, it offers visceral, material, and emotional heft to acts of preservation that span a breadth of localities: selves, communities, and social (Hobart and Kneese 2020).

In my definition, tender jotería care is a type of care that accepts queer Latinindigenous roots, traumas and knowledge as the forefront lens towards transformation that turns survival into true living.

Self taught as an artist, my axiom “strength in tenderness” guides both the practice and presentation of my work. I engage in light, minimalist sketches using a digital canvas. Here, the use of as few lines as possible—oftentimes leaning on my mindful practice of creating one-line sketches—serves as commentary on the sense of wholeness those seemingly perceived as ‘work in projects’ can imbue. My focus has long been masculine subjects, whose corporeality is often denied the very tenderness I see as central and grounding. I use this experience to think and work through how rebirth, care and divinity expresses itself through queer minoritarian masculinity.

On my best days, I hope my art is read as tender, ephemeral, queer. I am in love with healing touch, with slow pleasure, with something that lasts a moment but can linger a lifetime—I love goosebumps. And so in this way, I am interested in queer moments that aren't just sexy or romantic or boldly true; but simply about being touched, and loved in that touch. This is the *jotería* care I am working to evoke. There is a quote by David Howes: “the soul is to be found where the body touches itself (Howes 2004).” How we touch all the seemingly fragmented parts of ourselves, the parts that make the whole of our dreams and visions— for me this is a generative space for healing, caring, and thriving.

In this season of my life as an artist and scholar, the healing I am interested in is the healing from sexual and interpersonal violence experienced by Latino and Asian men. When I am home in Hawai'i, the word *kama'āina* is used to say “people of the land”; for people of the Americas, there is the truth that “somos hijos de sol.” It is these phrases I have been meditating on as I work through tender *jotería* care for healing. Deserts are portrayed as rough, unforgiving spaces, but more than that, they are places of raw resiliency and fight to survive. I draw on times I've spent in American deserts to draw comparisons between the landscape and healing from sexual violence— from the outside, a seemingly hostile land; for those living through it, a space of solitude and resilience and the slow burn of survival. The desert is tenderizing, it makes us tender to the world in and around us.

Importantly, tender *jotería* care can be a blessing or an omen to attend for survivors of sexual violence. It may truly only be transformative care when it takes us from a place of danger to safety; if not that, then it is the shadow of an eagle, so far above us we cannot ride to freedom, only chase its outline. It is in this organic, open secret of the desert, of bodies, that I feel is imperative to manifesting what healing can truly be for those of us fighting to still bloom in this always summer, this land of which we are. This, I begin to feel, is *jotería* care.

References

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. (2012.) *Borderlands/La Frontera*. 4th Edition San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Clardy, Justin Leonard. (2019) .Civic Tenderness as a Response to Child Poverty in America. In
- N Brando & G Schweiger (eds.), *Philosophy and Child Poverty: Reflections on the Ethics and Politics of Poor Children and Their Families*. Springer.
- Gutierrez-Perez, Robert. (2015). Disruptive Ambiguities: The Potentiality of Jotería Critique in Communication Studies. *Kaleidoscope* vol 14.
- Hames-García, Michael. (2014). Jotería Studies or the Political is Personal. *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*. 39.1, 135-142.
- Hobart, Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani and Tamara Kneese. (2020). Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times. *Social Text* 142 volume 38, 1-16.
- Howes D. (2005). Introduction. In D Howes (ed.) *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*.Berg.
- Tronto J. C. (2013). *Caring Democracy: Markets Equality and Justice*. New York University Press.

Artist Statement—*Máscaras* Series

Juan Antonio Trujillo

Portraiture as inquiry

The *Máscaras* photo series is one component of an ongoing autoethnographic exploration of the nexus of queerness, Latinidad, and religion that has also included short experimental nonfiction film, academic articles, and creative writing. Autoethnography seems particularly well suited for jotería studies as a discipline, especially when one “embraces fluidity” (Adams and Holman Jones, 2008, p. 384) with regard to boundaries of discipline and form in pursuit of an oppositional and transformative representation of the joto self. Although it falls outside the scope of traditional peer-reviewed scholarship, (self-)portraiture, when one engages in it with an autoethnographic eye, addresses representation and the visual language of identity in the most direct way possible, opening a new world of discourse around queer/joto representation and experience—a discourse with rich aesthetic and affective dimensionality.

Although presented here as static artifacts, the *Máscaras* photos should be understood as part of a process-oriented scholarly practice. An artist’s decisions regarding medium, setting, composition, etc. all contribute to a series of photographs being a deliberate and mindful exercise in self-representation, yet at the same time much of its value as a tool for inquiry comes after the print is made, when curated images go out into the world. It is then that the performativity of the creative process is fully consummated, the level of self-exposure and vulnerability reaches its peak, and the work becomes a potential catalyst for collective reflection and transformation.

About the *Máscaras* series

These *Máscaras* photos, numbers IV through VIII in the series, are traditional selenium-toned gelatin silver prints produced from 35mm film negatives. The rest of the series includes additional 35mm and medium-format images and more poses, including nudes. The choice of medium in itself is significant; photography played a role in complex traumas involving bodily autonomy and sexuality during my early childhood and adolescence, and this work on some level can be viewed as an exercise in reclaiming power over my own representation and subjectivity.

The combinations of self portraits and artifacts of cultural and religious significance were created spontaneously in camera through the use of multiple exposures—usually three per frame. The effect is at times one of stark and accessible juxtapositions of the self with familiar Latinx cultural signifiers of forces such as death and evil in the form of masks, referencing both the lenses through which we see and are seen and the mantles we assume as we present ourselves to the outside world. At other times the images become dreamlike, textural, and somewhat hermetic, evoking with layered facial expressions and ghost-like figures an ongoing and fluid process of reconciliation between lived joto experience and homophobic religious indoctrination. In every case the presence of multiple layers and indiscrete images documents the multifaceted and dynamic nature of joto identities.





Artist Statement—Máscaras Series 131







References

- Adams, T. E. & Holman Jones, S. (2008). Autoethnography is queer. In N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln, & L. T. Smith (Eds.) *Handbook of critical and indigenous methodologies* (pp. 373-390). Sage Publishing.

Pleasure in the Last Gilded Age

Mario Alberto Obando

Abstract

“Pleasure in the Last Gilded Age” are three poems that center queer intimacies and desires oscillating from historical memory of the neocolonial violences that transpired and linger in the isthmus of Central America and the cultural politics of life in the U.S. from a Central American diasporic perspective. Rendering the last stage capitalism as “the last Gilded Age” the poems aim to capture queer Central American and Latinx pleasures, conversations and reflections as always already forged within the memories of ancestors who suffered through state-sanctioned violence.

Keywords: Pleasure, Queer Central American desire, neocolonial memory

1

*Amarillo, darkens your red outline
And lo rojo, lightens your brown eyes
You stare at me, wondering when
The idiom of reason seizes
And the facts of nature realign*

Your orejas swing in the wind
Your spirit doesn't sway
your shadow outlasts your matter
a warm loneliness in the sun
steps in front of you
only sketched out by our suppression

red stained hands reach out
across the gulfito
a white walker arrives in
land already hallowed out by
those of the peninsula
little is known of the
destiny manifested in our isthmus

the hueco in the middle of our pelvis
bronzed by a dream of French brutality
amidst the heart of civilization, in Egypt
marks, forever, a hallowed out,
manufactured dream of Anglo progress

between the peninsula that names your prayers
and the Northern rough that claims to be our father
this isthmus is no hallowed ground for your vacation
yet, it is the white lotus, the new Hawaii,
where Jeff Bezos rockets to space
are answered by an eighteen-year old
in an Amazon call center
in pointed sands, in the rich coast
where I had my first Churchill

the right to work
and own the means of production
what of no rights?
What of no work?
What of no production?

Where does the leisure go?
Where does philosophy go?
When the world, that we want,
Comes to be...

Unfortunately, the evangelist desire triumphs
Revelation is the goal of the west
Creating the conditions for the second coming
They destroy the native, the earth and the queer
For him to come again

The weight of the world
Tik, tok, the wretched salt
We know something he doesn't
Leisure wrought by the backs
Of the bronzed, and bloodied
Prompts a hell on earth

How do I rest without hospitality?
Asked the wise investor
How do I love without consuming?
Asked the smart romantic
How do I find myself without a degree?
Asked the abused dreamer

in the night,
amidst the starry sky,
in the smog,
right before you evacuate
there is a mother who rested
there is an elder who never talked
who never found peace
after being turned over
in the garage of his family's home

He brings forth good news
The end is never the end
And the beginning is never the beginning
Fantasies of charity and
Humanitarianism will not save us
Lest we grow meek and forget that
Napoleon was the first and last
earthquake
Of Haiti

There is no humility and modesty
To be found in the tropes of this
Territorial rape called tourism
Settler colonial variants
Quilted skies, and viruses
A place where an agave plant becomes a
Basketball player's tequila

She blows smoke on her lover's belly button
Her lover giggles, turns over,
And whispers in her ear...

*Amarillo, darkens your red outline
And lo rojo, lightens your brown eyes
You stare at me, wondering when
The idiom of reason seizes
And the facts of nature realign*

2

*!Ajúa! lightens our lush autonomy
And lo verde, darkens our open invitation
We stare at each other, knowing how
The stakes of discourse loosen
And the myths of history reign*

Ernesto,
How have your motorcycle diaries
Become Thomas Guides to Guatemala?
You'd be sad to know that the only

Jacobo they yearn for drives a benz
I wonder though, what happens to
The dreams of the roaring 50s
And of the revolutionary
Without your desire
That ardente love of each other

Ernesto,
I do not know how to tell you this
But I am alive,
I've been meaning to tell you
But you do not seem to listen
You do not seem to notice
The way my belly hangs over my thoughts
You do not seem to acknowledge
The way I jumped yesterday
At the sight of a 2 for \$7 deal
At Carl's Jr.
I do not how to tell you this
But I am alive
And your dead.

I never met you, nor will I.
You loved fixing your moto
And constantly wanted to take a trip
I always thought that would be me
Grow out my hair, wear the hat
And now, I look more like Alberto than Che
I don't know how to tell you this, Ernesto,
But I am somehow living, and you were murdered.

Where you end is where we begin
We ardently ended our military
You ardently fell without one
The sixties killed you of bullets
The twenties would have
Killed you of covid
And if you hung with us
Of bullets too

Asthma, and viruses
What of revolution
What of intimacy
Here, I write, I extend
Angry at the mistakes
Of your time
Angry at the mistakes
Of this time

How do we touch
The hemisphere?
How do we entangle
Ourselves beyond
Questioning ourselves
And interrogating each other?

A bad cough
a boat off the coast of Mexico
Where I re-envision your
Inspiration from Guatemala
As the grounds for the eroticism
You shared with Fidel

Bad coughs remain
Nightclubs shine, and dim
Bodies move, as do the bullets
Pulsing through in Orlando
Would the shooter have been
A revolutionary?

Don't answer that
I already know
That lo que se sabe
No se pregunta

There we arrive at the hotel ballroom
Ladrones y mestizes
Ready to drink,
Hundreds took flights
Amidst this pachacuti
Conversations are ongoing

I eavesdrop
Quietly,
I listen to one panel discussing the
Panama Canal, and
Obvious touch that must have been shared
I eavesdrop from a booth in a busy Korean
Restaurant in the ghost town of Sacramento
They have your face on their shirt
They about Keanu Reeves as Neo
And Mark Paul Gosselaar as Zach
And Enrique Iglesias as Julio's son, not Isabel's
and David Bautista, Jason Momoa
why Chicanos don't like Mario Lopez
why Chicanas don't like J'Lo
I overhear "is it spelled with a 'ion' or a 'ian'"

There has to be more

You are murdered,
We are murdered
In the window
A memory restored
Of a little blonded teenager
Turned heartthrob through dye
Where the bull is tamed
And the fight begins
Where the embargo is signed
Where the ambiguity becomes
Free-trade, where the strategies
Become flirtations, memories

There has to be more than
A return to a suburb devoid of murals
And your history devoid of us

*!Ajúa! lightens our lush autonomy
And lo verde, darkens our open invitation
We stare at each other, knowing how
The stakes of discourse loosen
And the myths of history reign*

3

We walk over a bridge built in the 1980s
Two ropes and twelve wooden steps over the creek
In the air is the smell of the murdered pigs
A stench that I can never shake
Murder said Morrissey

We recognize each other
We play as if infinite miles and endless time zones
Don't separate us
The carambolas hang for picking
The beans are ripe, caldo is waiting
Murder said Morrissey

What is it like to tell truths
Conjured by our own reading of things?
What is like to ignore the facts of
Everyone and everything we love?
To be anxious and certain at the same time
Is a dangerous concoction of the delusional

Murder said Morrissey
Cleared visions of the Dutch East Indian Trade
Stratifying and horrifying, hips turn toward
An orientation of British first, my woes first
My guilt overflows, his arrogance in season

It was murder said Morrissey
Established traditions of Catholic panic
His battered soul rung in the inroads
Of confused Yankees in the heartlands
Of terrified Spanish

I understood so much of myself
For a brief period of time in your stories and lyrics
Of feeling at home and of feeling at ease
In misery, you kept me alive

It was murder of the spirit really
Why doesn't Caifanes land first?

There is no helpless or hopeless
Tattered or tattooed kid anymore

No rotting lemons breaking the
Limbs of an overwatered tree
In the backyard of a 5th generation
Home

No flies buzzing over the corpse
of half-eaten mangoes
or half-bitten lips
food being eaten while writing
you are the fast food
before I discovered
meat is indeed murder

and, it is true, what he said
and, it is true, nothing of which he did
and, it is true, and it is true

Perceiving the casket drop six feet
Knowing in my heart
We will never experience each other the same way
I can already feel the cloud of not distinguishing day from night
Of being angry with those who did not care for you the way I did
Or perhaps those who did not allow me to

The sun burns in this neutral state
Protected by too much application of
American desire for us and us for them
When will the invitation expire?
Do we hold onto revelations?
Do we let the world end?

And yet, no military, green zones
Ports for Americans
Stadiums paid by earmarked autocrats
Everything for sale,
Everyone must go
Just as the pleasures of life
In the last gilded age

Tototlán/Jototlán

Luis Esparza

Tototlán,
Lugar de pájaros
Aves Amorosas
Que me guiaron hacia tus ojos
Curiosamente, a la entrada del Oxxo

Jototlán,
Lugar de Jotos
Cuna de la Jotería
Amores de Loco@s

Este paraíso, más bello que el oro
Enamorado quedé
Del Californiano de la calle Matamoros
Los momentos contigo
Siempre los tesoro
Awebo!, que te adoro

Jototlán,
Lugar de Jotos
Cuna de la Jotería
Amores de loco@s

Laura la cantante
Bobes el Neto
Juanjo el del Imperio
Sabas el mero mero

Jototlán,
Lugar de Jotos
Cuna de la Jotería
Amores de loco@s

Jototlán,
Diáspora infinita
Descendencia de la Cotita

Californiano, vuela
Vuela hacia Jototlán
Las cadenas del amor
No te dominarán

Jototlán,
Lugar de Jotos
Cuna de la Jotería
Amores de loco@s

Incense

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez

*Smell of piety
smell of sanctity.*

The miraculous substance rises
as a dark grey cloud from the bowl
that the altar boy forcibly swings,
dispersing into the atmosphere.

I return when I breathe it:
Nose, mouth, throat—brain.
The delicate drug of religion
against my veins, seducing.

Fragrant, centuries of tradition
and belief: Medieval cathedrals
waging wars
of light and darkness;

Stained glass windows
assembling moments of devotion
and surrender;
saint marble statues

covered in velvet, flesh-hiding dress;
half-naked angels
loitering pastel blue skies
next to floating Virgins.

Stories of repentance and
redemption, selflessness
and love; images and stories
shaping the consciousness of
man.

(All whilst quelling
the other senses: the sound
of ruptured muscles, the taste
of fresh squeezed blood).

I submit. Smell, ritual, love.
In our deepest longings
we find the need to belong.

God!
Here is my body—appease my angst!
Never will I be myself again
but the instrument of your desires.
Never again will I suck a dick.

All in the name of placing meaning
in the void, of rising above
our mere meek selves, forever and ever.
Amen.

Apology to My Sister
Written at the Desk of the Hotel Room in Yuma
the Morning After Getting my Teeth Extracted

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez

If I wasn't so in love myself, I would tell you all.

I would tell you, for example, I can stand my own reflection only in the earliest hours, when the only light to light your face is that of the moon, or a streetlamp (distorting it; revealing a different version of me) and I can structure but half of it.

I would tell you that as a boy I was taken by the image of mountains at night (not the ones by cities, no; those in places far away, wholly devoid of artificial light) as they seemed to disappear, swallowed up in solid darkness.

How every time I'm at the threshold of my being, I feel so far from everyone, overwhelmed by silence—a heavy unbearable sadness that gently but unavoidably begins to pull to the bottom of a restless ocean.

How I don't inhabit spaces; spaces inhabit me, trespassing me like autumn wind-tossed leaves or the tissue paper cutouts solemnly wafting across Mexican streets yearly throughout the month of September.

That I fear failure, I feel, more than others. Despite what I've said, what you think. And that I'd rather hide than have others see me and pity me.

If I wasn't so afraid of myself perhaps you too would feel less lonely; you'd find in me someone to confide in and together we would laugh.

But I'm selfish, and though I have your secrets, I refuse to give you mine (even as they lay encrypted, exposed and hidden, under bright daylight.)

For if I wasn't so ashamed of myself, I would never write.

Amanecer San Francisco

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez

Desde el alto balcón de un hotel
lo observo todo:

Movimiento, mañana. Ser.

Marcha, con calma, todo...

La luz de sol oriental
suavemente iluminando el suelo
que se dobla y se convierte en paredes y fierros
de escapes de emergencia

creando sombras gráficas
en anchas superficies de edificios
(algunas sólidas, otras cubiertas con
tigres y pavorrales gigantes, etc.)

Fresco, el viento me sopla la cara

Alrededor, a lo lejos:
Percusión de motores y pitidos.

Gritos. Muchos gritos.

Solo queda la vaga memoria
de la noche anterior... la pregunta:

¿En qué momento se postró la noche
para convertirse en día?

Es hora de hacer línea en los cafés;
la noche ha terminado
y hay que regresar a pretender ser hombre.

Poema de amor de la muerte al hombre

Oscar Gabriel Chaidez

Envidio
tu cuerpo fascinante.

Tu cara simétrica
y cuadrada.

Tus ojos grandes
y pestañas largas.

Envidio tu llanto
agonizante

a la hora de la noche
y a la hora de la vida.

Tan sólido
y tan lleno de sí mismo

efímero
cual sol de día pasante.

*

Río claro
en el que piensas

fuelle suave
en la que olvidas.

Como la piña del pino
entre las estaciones creces

como su aguja en el invierno
permaneces.

Se alargan tus manos
y tus dedos—

sientes en tu eje
un calor eterno

Después te marchas
como un pez en río

vagando lento y solo
entre las aguas de los pozos
del vacío.

*

La forma delicada
con que coges una taza.

Tus piernas altas, gruesas
y peludas

caminando a todas partes
(yo detrás de ellas

como un perro fiel.)

Cauteloso
me acerco a ti

para complacerte
en lo que se te ofrezca.

Para poder tibir
toda mi sangre fría.

*

Envidio
la carne entre tus huesos

y la sangre de tu carne.

Todo tú: tejido tras tejido
capilares tan tiernitos

e indefensos
creando un ser tan liso, suave

¡tan perfecto!
inconsciente

de su cruel defecto.

*En la madrugada
mientras duermes*

*escucho tu respiro
y siento menos tu desprecio.*

*Te mueres un momento
y yo me siento libre*

*entre tanta
culpa, culpa, culpa*

*Por encender tu sueño
y de quemar tus alas*

*de ponerte freno
y destruir tu cara.*

Fuego de mi leña
copa de mi vino

¿Si fuera *el agua*
me beberías?

¿Si fuera *un sueño*
me compartirías?

¿Si fuera *ella*
me responderías?

*

Cuerpo fiel
me adentro a ti

cual el cangrejo
al mar.

Sintiéndome en ti
como ola disolvente

tus ojos son los míos
y los míos son la brisa

Tu cuerpo es el arena
y mi cuerpo es
como el aire.

Pesadillas Pornográficas

Pablo Ramirez

Abstract

I turn to poetry as a way of theorizing joteria. How I come to understand it as theory, as well as how it is awakened within my body, is best described using free verse. Through poetic reflection I recall specific moments of questioning sexuality. By observing the mundane, everyday nature of compulsory heterosexuality I, then, positioned my own queerness as covert, and surreptitious. In so doing, I fed into my internalized homophobia. Linking my queerness to my Latinidad is central to my critique and poetic reflection as I flow between English and Spanish.

Keywords: Joteria, Queerness, Latina/o/x, Poetry, Bilingual

Dreaming of midnight erections
And spoonfuls of salt,
I plotted adultery.
Mapping the terrain of the joto
Beneath,
I sustained the spectre
 Of mi homosexualidad.
Feeding birds
To think of the bird that'll feed me.

“Sexo,
Sucio,
Sin vergüenza.”

Mis padres nunca me hablaron de cosas
“matrimoniales,”
Pero en esos tiempos,
Detective¹, fui.

Como niño estudioso,
 El cual le gusta leer y escribir,
 Me puse a aprender.

All I had to go off of were
Telenovelas of cis-women that shared a similar name to my mother
 Was I meant to fall in love with my mother?
Would that have made me normal?
Confundido, me quede

Attending quinceañeras to witness
El sabor sensual
De las tías
Apretadas en las manos de los tíos
Mirando y fijando
De la manera de amar
Pero la mano en la pija, no tengo

¹ Detective is spelled the same way in both Spanish and English. I am using the Spanish pronunciation of the word *detective* in this poem, and it should be read that way.

Creating my own fantasy

I married.

woman?

I children.

I house.

I job.

I

complete?

Successful in the “mirage of marriage”

My dreams turned sour

I tasted the briny sea

Y escuche el llanto de llorona

Ahogando hijos.

Mi panza de *embarazado*.

Susurrando;

Entre labios

Tus secretos eternos

Acaríciame,

Y conóceme.

Arrímate y Encuéntrame.

Despertando de madrugada

I felt the dead weight

Of my shame.

Fevered body drowned in pools of sweat,

I prayed for escape in ice-cold showers.

But the memory of *pesadilla* only fed the flame.

The flame. Soon turned flamer.

Maricon.

I stitched each letter of label

Onto my lips.

Kneeling on floors that ripped my flesh,

I turned away.

Perdóname, por favor.

Sálvame.

Sana Sana Colita de Rana.

Still.

At night.

I dreamt of treason.

Faggot.

Biographies

Michael Tristano, Jr.

Michael Tristano, Jr. (Ph.D., Arizona State University) is Assistant Professor of queer intercultural communication and performance studies at Towson University. His research focuses on the material conditions of queer and trans people of color and the means by which queer and trans communities of color engage in worldmaking practices and perform survival and joy in light of oppressive conditions. His most recent work has appeared in *Text and Performance Quarterly* and *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*. His pronouns are he

Xamuel Bañales

Dr. Xamuel Bañales is an associate professor and director of the Ethnic Studies program at California State University, Stanislaus. Bañales completed their doctorate degree from UC Berkeley and has authored essays in a variety of anthologies and journals, including: *Ethnic Studies Review*; *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*; *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*; *The Bilingual Review/Revista Bilingüe*; and *North American Congress on Latin America*.

Andrew Spieldenner

Andrew Spieldenner, PhD (he/him) is a longtime HIV advocate, Executive Director of MPact, a global gay rights group and Associate Professor at California State University-San Marcos. José A. Romero (they/them) is a social justice activist. A graduate of University of Pennsylvania, their focus is on Black, Latinx, and low-income communities, particularly in the South with advocacy groups, non-profits and other socio-political formations.

Luis Oswaldo Esparza

Luis Oswaldo Esparza is originally from Tototlán, Jalisco, Mexico, but raised in the Inland Empire region of California. He identifies as Queer, Joto, Xicano, Transnacional and most importantly, a social justice warrior. He is a PhD student in Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of New Mexico and concurrently serves as an adjunct professor at Central New Mexico Community College.

María Céleri

María Céleri is an Assistant Professor of Gender, Women's & Sexuality Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Her current book project, *Uncovering the Virgen del Panecillo: Quito's Postcolonial Urban Transformation & Decolonial Future Imaginaries*, is a cultural analysis of the monument of the Virgen del Panecillo in Quito, Ecuador. Her research interests include decolonial feminisms; Latin America & Caribbean Studies (Andean Studies); queer/cuir studies; cultural/media studies.

Pico del Hierro-Villa

Pico del Hierro-Villa is a Trans Fronterzix from El Paso currently getting their MA in Chicanx Studies at the University of New Mexico. Pico serves as a board member for the Association of Joteria, Arts and Activism (AJAAS) and oversees the AJAAS organization at UNM where their commitment is to uplift Queer and Trans specific research. Their academic focus is on combining a mixed methodology of testimonios and photography to not only document Queer history in Albuquerque but to uplift the stories of Queer and Trans ChicanX/Mexican individuals.

Elaine Almeida

Elaine Almeida is a Mass Communication doctoral student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a qualitative scholar interested in how minoritarian storytellers utilize care to transform digital spaces, with an emphasis on Asian and Latino men who survive sexual violence. She further explores her interests through her role as a digital artist on Instagram.

Juan Antonio Trujillo

Juan Antonio Trujillo is a recently-retired academic who is continuing his autoethnographic exploration of intersections of religion, sexuality, and Latinidad in both visual and written mediums. He is currently based in Portland, Oregon where he runs El Inverso Productions and co-organizes the annual Tag! Queer Shorts Festival, both of which provide opportunities to bring QTBIPOC stories to a broader public.

Mario Alberto Obando

With his heart in the pueblos of Palmichal and Tabarcia and the capital city of San José, Costa Rica where he was born, Dr. Mario Alberto Obando (he/him/his) found his intellectual home as an Assistant Professor of Chicana/o Studies in the Department of Chicana/o Studies at CSU

Oscar Chaidez

Oscar is a PhD student in the program of Comparative Literature at the University of Texas at Austin, where he specializes in queer Latin American literature and culture. Specifically, he is interested in the relationship between religion and sexual politics in this region of the world, and the way writers/artists evince and transgress their complicity. He was born and raised in Mexico until the age of ten, when he moved to Las Vegas. The first person in his family to attend college, he graduated from UNLV with a double bachelor.

Pablo Ramirez

Pablo Ramirez is a graduate student in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University. His research interests lie within the intersection of performance studies and critical/cultural studies. Previous research projects focus on the cultural intersection of Latina/o/x identities and queerness. His commitment to research attempts to bridge theories of the flesh and the aesthetic (i.e., poetry, narrative, and solo performance).

For subscription/sales and general information contact:

Latino Research Center
Phone: (775) 784-4010
Fax: (775) 784-1388
latinocenter@unr.edu

Subscription Fees:

Vol. XIV 2023	Individuals	Libraries and Institutions
USA	\$15.00	\$20.00
Foreign	\$15.00	\$25.00
Back Issues	\$15.00 + \$5.00 shipping and handling	

If you are interested in receiving Volume XIV of *Border-Lines*, or acquire past issues please fill out the following form or visit the *Border-Lines* tab on our website www.unr.edu/latino-research-center.

Name

Organization

Address

City	State	Zip Code
------	-------	----------

Fax	e-mail
-----	--------

Yes, I would like to receive _____ copies of volume(s) _____ of *Border-Lines*, for which I am enclosing payment for a total of \$ _____

Please make checks payable to “Board of Regents” and send your payment along with the subscription form to:

University of Nevada, Reno
Latino Research Center, Mail Stop 434
Reno, NV 89557

**Border-Lines is a scholarly journal published annually by the
University of Nevada, Reno Latino Research Center.**







Border-Lines is published with the generous support from
the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts