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Humanizing the Other

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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

Humanizing the Other

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR JOE PARKER
AND
PROFESSOR SUSAN PHILLIPS

AND

DEAN GREGORY HESS

BY

CYNTHIA ORTEGA

FOR

SENIOR THESIS

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Acknowledgements

With a single page, I could not possibly thank everyone who has liberated my mind, my hopes, my body, and my soul, though I can recognize those few who have facilitated my recognition of this liberation. Everyone who has paved my way toward a deeper understanding of myself and my existence within the complicated yet fascinating world we live in, is in my heart today and forever.

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I Am Joaquin
By Rodolfo Corky Gonzales

Yo soy Joaquín,
perdido en un mundo de confusión:
I am Joaquín, lost in a world of confusion,
caught up in the whirl of a gringo society,
confused by the rules, scorned by attitudes,
suppressed by manipulation, and destroyed by modern society.
My fathers have lost the economic battle
and won the struggle of cultural survival.
And now! I must choose between the paradox of
victory of the spirit, despite physical hunger,
or to exist in the grasp of American social neurosis,
sterilization of the soul and a full stomach.
Yes, I have come a long way to nowhere,
unwillingly dragged by that monstrous, technical,
industrial giant called Progress and Anglo success....
I look at myself.
I watch my brothers.
I shed tears of sorrow. I sow seeds of hate.
I withdraw to the safety within the circle of life --
MY OWN PEOPLE

I,
Of the same name,
Joaquín,
In a country that has wiped out
All my history,
Stifled all my pride,
In a country that has placed a
Different weight of indignity upon my age-old burdened back.
Inferiority is the new load

I look at myself
And see part of me
Who rejects my father and my mother
And dissolves into the melting pot
To disappear in shame.

I shed the tears of anguish
as I see my children disappear
behind the shroud of mediocrity,
never to look back to remember me.

I am Joaquín.
I must fight
and win this struggle
for my sons, and they
must know from me
who I am.

I am the masses of my people and
I refuse to be absorbed.

Prologue

I would like to use parts of Gonzalez's poem as an introduction to a piece of writing that attempts to give a voice to those that have been silenced. Gonzalez's poem is full of intensity, remorse, contempt, and hope to name a few of the contending forces within the intersectional and interdisciplinary discussion of Mexicans experiencing the United States. These emotions grapple both internally then outwardly to create some sense of cultural identification through introspective criticism. A process toward a sense of agency establishment starting with a rise in individual acknowledgement of unjust, socially constructed and disciplining power relations, and ultimately leading toward a conscious method of reflection and critical thinking. Racial, cultural, and socioeconomic struggles tug and pull at Joaquin's identity in a similar manner than they do to the immigrant community. I would like to attempt what Joaquin has done for himself, and give a voice to the internalized turbulence that keeps many Mexican immigrants in the U.S. silenced and marginalized as an alienated group, denying them the unencumbered realization of individual potential that any human being deserves.

By promoting storytelling as a method towards understanding and knowing the experience of the “other”, in this case Mexican immigrants of all shapes and colors, sexual preferences, and diverse socioeconomic standing, I would like to shift the discourse from their potential as socioeconomic assets towards recognition of their essence as participating members of our community. Immigrants are artist, they are intellectuals, they are leaders. They are just not given the space in American society to develop their potential without being chained down to the “immigrant” label. I would like to stress the recognition of fluidity and diversity within this marginalized group, in the sense that to assume a homogenous experience for this

population aggravates the gap of understanding, tolerance, acceptance, and celebration of this rich community. Hegemonic forces have kept immigrants in the shadows, blinded, and hidden from the rest of society. My ultimate goal is to promote an idea of fearless engagement in active, undisciplined, self-determined embracement of the hybrid culture that remains buried under layers of socially constructed self-disciplining forces of domination.

It is time to shine the light on them. It is time to shine the light on US! The first step to successfully embarking on this journey is breaking away from the customary “otherness” to embrace and validate the inclusivity of my argument. ¡*Yo soy inmigrante Mexicana!* This is by far the most difficult sentence to express throughout this whole literary piece for many reasons, explored and unexplored, questioned and repressed, but nevertheless hindering. Social constrictions have been clawed so deeply into my skin that the pain of not being able to recognize and express my own identity was numbing and disempowering. But now I embrace it, for my community and for myself. I write not talking about an X or discussing with an X, but speaking as an X and for all those X's that yearn to hear the voice of someone similar in order to raise their own.

¡*Hablen, y nos escucharan!*

“Estamos viviendo en la noche de la Raza, un tiempo cuando el trabajo se hace a lo quieto, en lo oscuro. El día cuando aceptamos tal y como somos y para en donde vamos y porque--ese día será el día de la Raza. Yo tengo el compromiso de expresar mi visión, mi sensibilidad, mi percepción de la revalidación de la gente mexicana, su mérito, estimación, honra, aprecio, y validez.”

- Gloria Anzaldúa

MacDonal

“There is no nation which does not need to borrow from others.”

- John Stuart Mill

19th century British philosopher and economist.

Buenas. Me llamo Evangelina de Jesus Calvillo Peredia, pa servirle. Soy católica...y...soy una mujer honrada. Por eso me duele contar lo que me paso, pero...pero deben saberlo. Pa poder entendernos, deben saber que es lo que nos pasa en el desierto, detrás de las sombras, y bajo el silencio de nuestras propias voces.

I left my mother in order to save her. She would never have had the tranquility of a full fridge, with meat and all, if I had never sacrificed my youth and my dignity on my trip to *el Norte*. At first, I was acting as an economically rational agent in my decision to immigrate. The incentive was high, the cost was bearable, the coyote accepted installments, took checks, cash, and visa. It was a good investment on paper. There was a market for cheap labor, the demand was there, I could be the supply. Today, my opportunity cost has risen. The life I had before is worth so much more to me at this precise moment. The stakes were raised; the second best alternative *now* was living. I wasn't so sure I'd survive. The sand stung my skin, burned my eyes. *El zumbido del helicóptero interrumpió mi sueño de llegar al otro lado*. The American Dream, disturbed and contaminated, evaporated as I prayed to *my virgencita de Guadalupe* tightly grasping onto my neck. *Por meses me había imaginado comiendo en un restaurante donde te servían en copas de cristal. Siempre me pregunte que se sentiría pagar con un pedazo de plástico. Era algo increíble. En mis sueños pintaba una imagen de colores brillantes, de luces fosforescentes. La oportunidad de tener un carro que fuera mío, solamente mío, y el poder traer a casa morrales con carnes lujosas para mi madre era suficiente para embarcar en una aventura de incertidumbre*. But now, that dream seemed too expensive. The face of death stared at me laughing.

The red blood and white tears of immigrants painted across death's face were symbols of undeserved sacrifices, they reflected the stripes of the American flag, an ironic symbol of freedom and richness that hung high and tempted anyone with its majestic dominance. My blood would be written off as a loss in the ledgers of capitalism if I didn't make it across this desert. Capitalism advertised itself as an opportunity to escape hunger and poverty, it pulled and displaced many immigrants who just

wanted a piece of the pie. Capitalism fails to disclose that the pie was only for the owners of the profit, those that controlled the resources to produce more efficiently. The immigrant was a resource herself, cheap labor produces more efficiently (it costs less to maintain an immigrant than an American human being) and leaves more profit for the chief executive officers and the stakeholders. Had I not a stake in the product of my labor? It doesn't matter because on paper, I do not exist. I had given in to temptations, I had sold my soul. I had desired what my neighbor had so intensively that I risked my life for it, isn't that in the Ten Commandments somewhere? Was I sinning?

The silence was broken, and I was back in the present. A light from the sky scanned the desert for trespassers, for dreamers, for survivors. Heart pounding, wanting out from her cage, leg hedged between two rocks, *la migra* circling above my head, I realized there were more important things in life than money. I wondered why vegetarians were so uncommon in Mexico, having no meat wouldn't be that bad if they weren't. If Mexicans were not standing in American's shadows, we wouldn't be so hungry for flesh. I wondered why we craved so fervently the things abundant in the United States. Americans flaunted our shortcomings with the constant advertising of their economic superiority¹. They advertised a standard of living, a system of values, a lifestyle that was narrow minded and selfish, yet we all craved the American Dream. The short distance between Mexico and the United States was a geographical obstacle that could be overcome in 3 days of travel by bus, car, and on foot. The historical ache of undeserved land ownership of southwestern states was an incentive towards reconciliation with the land that once belonged to Mexico and was stolen. These elements plus the economic pull forces that were adverse effects of globalization made the trip an intriguing but dangerous adventure in search

¹ There are many reasons why the people I have known have come over to "el Norte". Like Saskia Sassen mentions in her excerpt from *Globalization and its Discontents*, US immigration is driven by more than simple "unfavorable socio-economic conditions in other countries". One of the major influencing factors is Western influence and the ties it has made in foreign areas. These linkages formed by political or economic factors are cause for attracting immigrants into the US. "Siempre quise trabajar en la fabrica Americana, me vine buscando más oportunidades como esas." *I always wanted to work for the American company in my town, I came looking for opportunities like the ones they offered* (Larios, Reyes). The United States invests its money in Mexican towns, waves around their lifestyles and values and uproots traditional ways of living (Sassen, Saskia).

for an even playing field. The land bleeds through the U.S.-Mexico border rivers that try to separate the inseparable. If only the Treaty of Lupe Hidalgo had not carved into the land a border so painfully destructive... The helicopter got closer, my shirt flapped so viciously it was impossible to grip my confidence. My consciousness faded; my eyes pulled together to shut out the fear and I disappeared from the desert.

Me desperté en el pueblo humilde donde las huertas eran mi parque, las palmas mis columpios, y las iguanas mis confidentes. It was a quiet town, pure and still somewhat innocent. It had yet to be tainted by major industrialization, by pollution, or the grayness of concrete infrastructure. Green was still abundant and a sense of communion was felt amidst the air. The palm trees lined the coast and circled the town. The morning fog was light, and carried with it the scent of the sea and the smell of the sand. The roads that led into the city were delicately paved with rocks from the mountains that protected Tecomina. The buildings in downtown were decorated with colorful strands of paper flowers. Our red, white, and green pride was hung from light posts, from the palm trees, painted on the few cars that drove around, and engraved into the hearts of all Mexican citizens. *La feria* was just around the corner, so everyone was naturally ecstatic about the games, and the lights, and the drinks to be served. Once a year the carnival would stop by and light up the town. Our small town in the state of Colima was a humble oasis amidst a hurt country. *La humedad empañaba la belleza de mi pueblo. La camioneta de Chuy rodeaba la manzana, se deslizaba sobre las piedras que empalmadas formaban una especie de carretera, ilusionando a los chiquillos que buscaban escapar la rutina del estilo de vida a la que estábamos condenados. Algún día tendría una camioneta negra para llevar a mi madre a la iglesia los domingos. Y después, pasearla por la plaza. Ya no tendría que cargar el mandado en su lomo, como lo había hecho por 55 años. Ese día, al mirar la camioneta roja y la seguridad que brillaba de los ojos de Chuy, le prometí a mi madre sacarla de la pobreza. Ya no volvería a sentir hambre.*

A warm hand touched my forehead. Wetness soothed my lips. I was back in the desert. The sun

had burned my face, made me browner. My lips were cracked, they bled drops of uncertainty. I opened my eyes, expecting a blonde officer handcuffing my dreams, but instead I saw another brown face that reflected hope and fear simultaneously. A true *paisano*. He said I had been unconscious for a while. The helicopter was gone, they had thought I was dead, but it was time to get moving. No time for critiquing the inhumanity of the hunt, so I gathered what strength I had left and stood up. My coyote had vanished. And with him went my money, my water, and any hopes of survival. America's doors were hell. The thought of paradise was what kept me going. I will not die in a blazing inferno, I will not be forgotten. Determination took control of my body, this is what Mexicans do. We survive. My face was drained of its brown tint; I was already starting to change. A day later, dehydrated and starving, I ran past a *Macdonal*. I couldn't stop, but the smell was enough to re-energize my spirit. The golden arches were only a myth where I came from. I was finally in the land of the free, in the home of the brave.

Two weeks passed. The golden arches stared at me from an empty happy meal bag on the left nightstand in the *Coyote's* bedroom. *Coyotes* could smell weakness. *El Diablo me había encontrado*. He was a legend for his inhumanity; he was the definition of exploitation. He victimized, he oppressed, he raped, and killed, yet he was a citizen. He had found me on the verge of passing out, lying in an alley, offered his help. This was my welcome to the states. I had survived hell only to be found by *El Diablo* and obliterated alive. For the most part, *Coyotes* controlled who passed and who didn't. They had an unofficial monopolistic control of prices and distribution of the immigrants seeking an opportunity at the American Dream. They profited from an unexplored gap in supply and demand, they had tapped into a market and were exploiting rents left and right. American Entrepreneurs.

The golden arches on the bag glared at me scrutinizing, criticizing, and accusing my victimized position with its blaring colors and the smell of capitalism still reeking from its pores, while the *coyote* stabbed my dignity with his penis. He inseminated shame and hatred, remorse would follow. He injected the values of careless and destructive ambition, the hunger for green paper, and the

individualistic way of Americans that differs so greatly from my culture's. I never walked into a *Macdonal* after that.

THE GOLDEN CAGE

*“Aquí estoy establecido,
en los Estados Unidos,
diez años pasaron ya,
en que cruce de mojado,
papeles no he arreglado,
sigo siendo un ilegal,”
- Los Tigres Del Norte*

Me llamo Rogelio Vazquez, tengo 41 años, soy norteño y esta es mi historia...

A pesar de que ya pasaron 12 años me pregunto diariamente que sería de mi vida, de mi familia, si no hubiera huido esa noche. Los relámpagos abren heridas que nunca sanaron. De repente el tiempo para, y me encuentro en el cuarto donde arrebataron mis ilusiones a golpes. Las fotografías que contaban una historia de injusticia y corrupción fueron destruidas a manos del mismo gobierno, y junto a ellas quedo enterrado el hombre que no pude ser. Ahora refleja en el espejo una mirada cansada y triste. Mis ojos caídos son una representación física del dolor que tantos años é guardado por dentro. Nunca olvidare el terror que demostraba la expresión de mi hija esa noche, le arrebate su infancia por querer exigir justicia de un sistema corrupto.

September 17, 1990. 1:15 am.

The door opens slowly as usual, as if to avoid disrupting his 3 year old daughter, even though Rogelio knows she waits up for him every night after work. His wife strains to keep her eyes open, her fear suppressed, and her attitude welcoming for when her husband gets home. They had been married for 3 years now, she just turned 20, he was 23, and Anahi was to celebrate her 3rd birthday tomorrow. He closes the door silently and when he flips the light switch on, the first thing he hears is “¡Papi!!” He turns around and there she is, his firstborn (whom he had thought was the baby boy he’d always wanted when he first heard of the pregnancy). But nevertheless, he loved her more than anything and was determined to make her into the strongest woman he had known, in order to ensure her happiness

and most importantly her safety.

Every night he sat with her as long as his eyes would allow him to, and pretended to be interviewing her for an article he was working on. He asked her questions about herself and her family, but the ones she answered the most passionately were the ones about her father and what he did for a living. With perfect pronunciation she described where, when, and with whom Rogelio worked. He was proud of her eagerness to learn and her dedication to memorizing and enunciating with such delicateness the names that would later prove to entrap him to an unforgiving chain of unfortunate events. But mostly, he was proud of her loyalty to this daily ritual in which the young and spirited journalist could bond with the admirable toddler, and erode all conflict he had encountered throughout the day, including the tension built up within the house for the lack of his presence and the fatherly responsibilities he seemed to forget. But it was not because he was a bad father, or that he didn't care, it was simply that he was too busy trying to change a system of oppression that involved government corruption, drug trafficking and the lack of a social voice to target the expanding issue. He wrote in attempt to inspire, in attempt to inform, in attempt to empower the people of Tamps.

After about half an hour of listening to his daughter describe every part of his body, from his disproportioned nose (which looked a lot like a crow's beak) to his black cowboy boots, he insisted they move on to another question. She refused. She began once again to repeat what were the things she liked about her father. He interrupted, "*mija, dime ahora que te gusta de tu mama?*" She refused. He insisted. She responded, "Nada". After some negotiating, one of the skills he had learned to perfect in order to be successful at his job, he got her to answer (She had been tougher to convince than many of the suspects he had interviewed for drug trafficking incidents), "*me gusta su pelo.*" Although he perfectly agreed, for that was definitely one of her most attractive attributes, it was an alluring black cascade that ended right before her most alluring attribute began, he pushed for a deeper answer. He figured for all the hours they spent together, there had to be something internal that a child would

appreciate from a maternal figure. “*Me gusta su bebito, el que está en su pancita.*” Not what he had in mind, but ironically it was internal to her mother and obviously something she felt a connection with. He realized he rarely sat down and appreciated his wife for reasons other than the two Anahi had just provided, so he understood her and stopped pushing for an answer he himself had not considered lately.

He did not consider himself a “*machista*”, at least not by white standards. Again, white Americans had renamed and redefined whatever foreign thing, person, or idea crossed their path. For Mexicans a few generations ago, being a “*macho*” meant you were an honorable husband and father. It meant you could provide and protect your family. Now it means the opposite. Americans bestow their conflicting emotions of fear and doubt among displaced Mexican Americans, inciting misplaced shame and anger. The internal conflict of shame and impotence boils inside Mexican guts, and then erupts. Americans see blatancy and label it violence. They redefine the word “*machistas*” and further victimize men whose pride has already been trampled on. Violence is not excusable regardless of gender or race, but the root of problems must be recognized and questioned before blame or judgment is bestowed upon any. But nevertheless, Rogelio realized that some of the gender dynamics he had meticulously criticized in his column had crept into his house. The patriarchic nature of society was unstoppable. He called it a night, and carried Anahi to join his wife as they crowded into their cozy full size bed. He promised her that for her birthday he would come home earlier the next day, and they could talk for longer. Anahi cuddled between her father's arms and closed her eyes excited about the day ahead of her, but mostly for the moment her father would flip on the light switch and she would see his *sombrero* again.

September 18, 1990. 9 p.m. Silence.

11 p.m. “He said he would be home early for my birthday,” Anahi complained. Her mother paced back and forth; phone in hand, eyes watery, speechless.

September 19, 1990. 1:37 a.m. She had forgotten about her birthday. She sat at the window and got butterflies in her stomach every time headlights appeared in the distance. She fell asleep with her forehead against the glass, and in her palm she gripped her father's Ray Ban glasses.

3:18 a.m. The door swings open and slams into the wall. Anahi jumps up startled. The light switches on. It's not his *sombrero*.

My name is Anahi and I was three when all this happened, I can vividly remember. I can still hear my mother's scream; her widened eyes, the guilt and powerlessness drawn across her face as she witnessed a stranger hold her only child at gunpoint right in front of her. His hands were icy cold and gave me Goosebumps that trickled all the way down to my toes. I do not remember feeling anything specific about the black shiny object that shoved into my shoulder. My thoughts were running wild, searching for a sign of my father. I focused on a couple of grunts that were coming from the darkness outside the window; that darkness that devoured the moonlight along with my innocence that night. “*¡Dame todas las fotos, las cámaras, las grabaciones, todo!*” The stranger shouted and the gun sunk deeper into my shoulder.

My mother stood shocked for a couple of seconds, waiting for my father's approval. I knew she was a strong woman; but like my father had said, patriarchy creeps up on you, and soon you start believing you need a man to tell you what left from right is. She looked around the room hysterically and that's when I heard him. A soft mumble, “*mija, dales todo.*” My heart raced at the sound of his voice. My heart sank when I saw the savages scrambling through our lives, tearing my father's dreams apart, and leaving his dignity scattered all over our living room floor. They beat him with guns until he

stopped making noises, and left him curled up in a ball on the dirt floor outside our home. It was the longest night of my life. This was what turning 3 was like for me. That night I was forced to grow up, I was forced to see what the world was like beyond the Barbie dolls and the pink horses. I traded my dolls in for my father's Ray Bans that night. Now when I put them on I see reality through the lens of the oppressed. When I hear discussions about domination over those marginalized, I can physically feel the pain. A knot forms in my throat and blocks my airway, I can't breathe; I can't swallow. Tears rush to my eyes at the sight of oppression. To physically embody the understanding of the marginalized is to have that epistemic advantage² that Narayan describes. It facilitates my comprehension of what's wrong with the world, but I am still without the courage to do anything about it. Something is missing, I am still afraid.

Mire la profundidad de la mirada de mi hija esa noche, and I knew we had to leave everything and flee. Justice would have to wait, my family comes first. The very next day we crossed into the USA. Not excited about the possibilities, but scared of the consequences. It was the only way to protect my family, but I knew that by crossing that border I would be losing everything; my career, my dreams and ambitions, my life as I knew it would disappear. By forfeiting my battle against injustice, by dropping my pen and fleeing, I no longer had credibility. My daughter would never be proud of me; my people would never trust me again. Those who came into my house, trashed my work and disrespected my family had left me with nothing but my physical body, mindless for the most part. Many Mexicans

2 Uma Narayan's idea of an "Epistemic advantage" refers to an experiential advantage that leads to differences in perception and understanding. If you were oppressed you are more likely to understand the issue of unjust power relations, and may be more prepared to critically question such forms of oppression. Narayan makes not that this may not necessarily be true because of the lack of homogeneity in the oppressed group. Therefore although it is a resource with potential as a site for agency establishment, it requires an individual effort to actively empower herself.

here in the United States are seen as a piece of meat, easily coerced into quiet production machines incapable of questioning authority. My hands would be nothing more than appendages with opposable thumbs. The hands that questioned the abuse of political power, the damage of corruption and defended the voice of the people with words that dripped from my heart onto sheets of paper were now condemned unworthy. I would never write again. My language, my skills, my passion were inadequate for the *gueros*; for they only read news they could handle, only the colorful stuff, the Sunday brunch material. The only things my hands gripped onto after the border was hammers, and shovels. My body was transformed into a machine, producing units of good in the most efficient way to maximize my boss's utility. My utility didn't matter; I could not afford to be a rational member of the American economy because my mind had been devalued. So instead, I focused on survival, repressing the revolutionary questions that got me here in the first place. Utility is supposed to translate into happiness for many economists, for the non-western world happiness is not necessarily about efficiency and money, there are traditional, cultural, and emotional decisions that have value to our communities but would be considered irrational for American logic. My mind started shrinking as soon as I crossed the bridge over to McAllen.

“Tengo mi esposa y mis hijos,
que me ls traje muy chicos,
y se han olvidado ya,
de mi Mexico querido,
del que yo nunca me olvido,
y no puedo regresar.”

“De que me sirve el dinero,
si estoy como prisionero,
dentro desta gran nacion,
cuando me acuerdo hasta lloro,
aunque la jaula sea de oro,
no deja de ser prision,”
-Los Tigres Del Norte

15 years later on a Monday I stopped by the DMV to renew my driver’s license. The attendant’s eyes looked down on my documents and said it wasn't enough. I wasn't enough. My driver's license was expired, I could not renew it; I was criminalized from one day to another.

Tuesday I called into my favorite radio station, they had been advertising a prize for the 9th caller. The phone rang, and a famous voice answered and declared me the winner, I was ecstatic. So many years in America and I had never won anything. Off the air, they explained I wasn't eligible. They could not give me the prize, even though I had been the right caller, even though I had answered all of the questions to prove I was a daily listener, even though I deserved it, I could not win. I had no social security number.

Wednesday I went out to eat with my wife. I ordered a shrimp cocktail and craved a pint of beer. I ordered. They asked for ID. I was rejected. My driver's license was expired, I was no longer qualified to be a consumer, or a citizen for that matter.

Thursday. I was driving home from work when I fell into an infamous check point. They were checking for drunk drivers at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. They isolated a frequently trafficked street, in a Latino neighborhood, after work, and pulled over every mustang and pickup truck that drove by. My

driver license was expired. Of course they took my truck for 30 days, and made me walk home. Miles of contemplation made me realize I was no longer part of my community. I was a stranger, an alien.

Friday I walked to the liquor store. NO ID NO BEER. I was driven out of everything I ever belonged to. I couldn't even lament my isolation without being reminded of my marginalized status. I had the Star of David sewn on my shirt, except it wasn't a star. It was a cactus, and it was sunk into my forehead, clinging on with its thorns screaming out my difference.

“Mis hijos no hablan conmigo,
otro idioma han aprendido,
y olvidado el español,
piensan como americanos,
niegan que son Mexicanos,
aunque tengan mi color.”

“De mi trabajo a mi casa,
no se lo que me pasa,
que aunque soy hombre de hogar,
casi no salgo a la calle,
pues tengo miedo que me hallen,
y me pueden deportar.”

-Los Tigres Del Norte

Saturday was my daughter's birthday, September the 18th. I needed to make it special, so I took my wife's car to the HEB down the street. I picked out a Hallmark card, written in English, and decorated with shoes, and purses, and tiny lipsticks. I guess this was what girls her age were supposed to be into. The card fit perfectly into a rose pink envelop that flapped shut with a sticker. A pink rose and her favorite chocolates would finish of the detail I was rarely capable of. She was my first born; I should make her feel special for once. I never asked her about her schoolwork, because I couldn't understand it. I never asked about her social life, because I couldn't accept or approve it. She never asked about my work like she used to, because it wasn't that interesting anymore. I never wrote anymore, I only hammered. I never asked why anymore, I only replied "yes sir".

I never made it home that Saturday night. The rose, the card, and the chocolates that sweetly attempted towards reconciliation never met her understanding. She never knew how much she meant to me. How much I had been proud of her. I wrote to her in English that night, in the language she used most comfortably. Trying to explain how sorry I was for making her journey toward a higher level of education such an impossible dream. I apologized for bringing her into an unknown country that hated her without ever getting to know her, and I wished her a happy birthday and the best of wishes in her ambitious attempts. She would never know this, for the cop a block away from my home thought I was a suspicious alien criminal trespassing the sacred borders of the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Sunday I was back in Mexico.

Chocolate Wonderballs

Hi there. My name is Enid. I'm 13 years old, Mexican-American, I think. I do know I'm a girl though, and I'm brown. I have two little sisters, and...oh, and at school they say I am a "non-native". But anyways, this is what I lived through.

Chrome rims, low trucks scraping the pavement, *la virgen de Guadalupe* painted on the back of the tailgate, *Los Tigres del Norte* blasting out the speakers on a Sunday morning at the *tianguis*. *Venimos todos los domingos a vender cosas usadas. Antes de que cante el gallo, mi hermana hace tacos de tortillas de harina con huevo y chorizo, y mi mama busca su canguro por toda la casa (según era el de la suerte), mientras mi papa y yo empacamos una sorprendente cantidad de cosas en una camioneta Chevy del 88. Siempre quise esa camioneta, teníamos algo en común (las dos habíamos llegado al mundo en el 88).* I never liked selling, but my mother said it was our thing: “*Algunos son abogados, algunos son policías, nosotros vendemos.*” When I was 9, 10, 11, and 12, every Sunday was a drag. I would wake up and hold my breath, run to the window hoping there were loud thunderstorms rattling up life outside my pink room. You'd be surprised how frequent that worked for me down in Southern Texas. I'd let out a sigh of relief, I knew that day I would get to be a normal kid on Sunday morning hoping for the smell of pancakes.

Rarely did I get pancakes; mostly it was *Huevos Rancheros*, *o tacos de barbacoa*. I mean I liked that stuff too, but sometimes you just want to be like everyone else. I yearned to fit in. I knew *tamales* on Thanksgiving were not American. *Piñatas* on New Years was not “normal”. Everything on television made it clear, turkey and football were American, I was not. I am 13 years old, and I never had a sleep over, I never went to six flags, and I never shopped at the mall. I got the *tianguis*, the *tortillas*, and the Sunday soccer games instead. I wore the tennis shoes with the flashing lights when you walked, I knew what “miscellaneous” meant *and* I could spell it. I even watched cartoon network without the SAP option for God's sake! And yet, I was still forced to sit in a classroom full of the

“Spanish speakers.” We were the “non-natives” according to the state, and every day we had ESL classes that took at least until lunch time. Then we had recess and we crammed in some English lit, Math, Science, and History before we were dismissed for the day. And they wonder why the TAKS Test scores were lower for the ESL students. It sure wasn't because we were dumb, or foreign.

The non-native classrooms were on the south side of the school. The portable buildings that stood physically apart from the rest of the school reminded me of those tiny trailers they used for offices on construction sites. We were strategically placed in an area where we could be watched. The idea that the principal's window faced south was enough to make us vigilant of our every move. If we got in trouble, our names would be ranked down. The ranking system was on the door for everyone to see. Green happy face, then yellow caution face, and finally red sad face. I followed the schedule rigidly, was never tardy, and took few restroom breaks, and still I always felt like I was being watched. The brown kids were always being watched. We had wooden decks that led us into the dull classrooms. There were only two colorful posters in the room and they were about learning to speak English. One of them had a picture of a brown kid being asked to play by a white kid at the park. The brown kid slowly enunciated the word “OK!” I never talked like that so I didn't understand the point of it. The regular classrooms had colorful posters all over the room; I know because I snuck in one day. They had numbers, and planets, and pictures of *La Niña*, *La Pinta*, y *La Santa María*. There were arts and crafts all over the room, hanging from one end of the ceiling to the other on a fluorescent fishing line. Our class never had time for arts and crafts; we had meticulous schedules that were enforced rigidly by anyone over 5 feet tall. All throughout elementary school the “non-natives” missed out on all sorts of cool activities, like camping trips, field trips to the museums, music electives, and all because we were “too busy” learning the language and traditions of the American way of life. I remember spending days on the controversy of the Thanksgiving holiday. The school director wanted the “non-natives” to play the Indians in the play, we wanted to be pilgrims, the fight was ironic. I knew what I was capable of,

but the docility enforced by the educational institutions was encumbering and I was scared to say something about it, to stray from the normalized. I would learn later that Foucault allowed me to criticize the docility enforced through the spatial manipulation of the body. The enforcement of ranks, and the physical layout of our buildings for strategic domination over our actions, was what made us so scared and manipulable all the time. All the time-tables that framed every second of our daily lives at school (we even had timed restroom breaks!), the pointless rituals (we had to stand in a perfectly straight line for at least five minutes, with our right index finger in front of our shut lips, and our left hand behind our back, before we could be let into our classroom) were strictly disciplining our bodies into a normalized plurality, and enforced upon us an intellectual inferiority that we feared questioning. Things were static for a while, I never said anything but started seeing things differently; life at home was always the same... different.

When we *did* make it to the fleamarket, (I never understood why they called it that by the way, maybe if you were flying above it and looked down, all the brown people looked like tiny fleas scavenging about. One man's trash was another's treasure) we were the first to get there and the last to leave. My mother was good at selling, even if she slaved away daily only to survive monthly. Saving accounts were too expensive; the opportunity costs were shelter, food, and clothing...the bare essentials. I used to watch as she talked people into buying so many things from her. The fleamarket was an unofficial market; it strays from the normality of a documented market, a controlled market. Everything in a fleamarket is cash, almost no transactions are done through electronic payment, the tracking is left to the hands of the people rather than controlled by machines. Cash was invisible, sort of like immigrants. There is no real way of tracking them. You don't need a social security number to sell at the fleamarket, you can be your own boss; that's why my mother loved it so much. She liked not having to follow orders for once, not from my dad, not from an employer. The fleamarket was her cite for agency, she was the woman in charge. The rules of patriarchy and capitalism can be transgressed for

the weekend at the *tianguis*. I was mostly happy because she always had me help her count all the cash when we got home. I was the oldest so I did the bills; my younger sister did the coins. I would separate the ones, the fives, the tens; the twenties and hundreds were exciting stuff. I used to count the money more than once, arrange it, rearrange it, then count it again. I imagined working at a bank, wearing the suits, my hair up in a pony tail, heels and all. Then my mother would ask how much. That was the one phrase she learned faster than “plis” or “huay”. It was always “hao much?”

How much money did we make today? How much does that cost? How much are we missing to have enough for the rent this month? How much? How much? How much? How much we didn't have. How much we always wanted. How much I was different from Petra, the 14 year old blonde who lived one street down on the other side of the church. She never worried about calculating the groceries budget before placing each item in the shopping cart. Milk \$2.49. Round to \$2.50, add 8.25% sales tax, we have twelve dollars and twenty three cents left. Ok, put it in the basket. Bread \$1.59...And so on and so forth, I decided what made the cut. When we had about one dollar left, I would cut my mom off to make sure we had enough. We usually did, I always rounded up to make sure there was change left over. I would save the change for the next time we came. Sheila and Ashley did not understand the economics of an immigrant family, the economics of survival. They saw the temptations of consumerism and asked for things without seeing the numbers. I did not understand why I had to carry the burden of knowledge. Numbers were all I ever saw.

The numbers stripped me from my innocence and haunted my desires. Money must be the root of all evil after all. It corrupts most, it burdens others, the desires and the pain of rejecting or giving in are equally enslaving. But I would put the items into the cart regardless, and pay for them with the spare change I had accumulated over weeks of agonizing grocery shopping. Such an easily overlooked, unexpected entrapping practice could be traumatically depressive when lived through immigrant's shoes. Pancakes are a luxury, sometimes an indication of treason. If I couldn't have pancakes, at least

they could have the “chocolate wonderballs.” Their eyes sparkled as they unwrapped a ball of capitalist temptation. Ashley, the younger one, cut off a piece from her little brown sphere and placed in on my palm. It was cold. When I placed the chocolate in my mouth I expected a flow of sweetness, if not from the chocolate from the feeling of giving in to desire. All I tasted was forfeit. Silver coins in my mouth reminded me of the luring of capitalism. I stood at the borderland once again; I either rejected a system of consumerism that enslaved its participants blindly into cycles of lust and debt, or fell freely into the arms of the ventriloquist, giving into the sweet temptation of the wonderballs. The ventriloquist maneuvers the Mexican puppets with subtlety and grace. It’s hard to see the reality when the master, the set, the scenery, the audience, the scriptwriter and the critic are all the same person; pale in skin color, dark in ambition, and savvy in technique. The puppet is doomed to rot in a grave unaccomplished and unevolved. Playing along to the normalized tune but never improvising. In the shadows it will remain until it can claim its own voice and take back his humanity, to once again become a she, a he, an artist, a father, a mother, an agent of his own. No longer will she be spoken for, or manipulated by the reigns that dehumanize her essence. She will rise from her grave and learn to practice existence rather than simply witnessing, immobile and incarcerated underneath normalized layers. She will experience society unencumbered and realize herself, rather than letting society materialize her experience.

Appropriated

I'm 18. I'm not sure who I am anymore...

The morning sun rose up quietly from behind the gulf of Mexico. The fog turned from an eerie vision that raised the hairs on the back of your neck to nothing more than what appeared to be a misplaced blur of clouds. The sun exposed a comforting version of our surroundings, a reality that we choose to see because it gives us a sense of strength. We believe that what we can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste must be reality because it is concrete. The more concrete the better, there is less room for questioning, and doubt, and insecurity. The sun comes up and in a matter of minutes, the shadows and sounds of the night are drained from our surroundings; we become courageous fighters during the day, as opposed to the scared victims of the night. The nightmares of the unconscious mind are no longer menacing, malignant forces upon your spirit. All of the sudden, the light from the sun vanquishes fear and you can go about your daily lives free from the mysterious chains of the night.

But for some reason today is different for me. Even with the sun high up on his kingdom and the rays raining down on the tips of my fingers, I look at the sky and although I feel the warmth of the light on my eyelids and caressing my lips, I can still feel a darkness weighing down on my flesh. The tiny hairs on the back of my neck rise; they are followed by a wave of Goosebumps that exacerbate feelings of unexpected and mysterious grimness. I look around and the distance between me and anything I can focus my eyes on doubles, then triples, slowly pushing me away from what I thought I was a part of. The post office at the corner of Wallisville is unreachable. I turn to my right. The library zooms out of my reach. I look over my left shoulder. The bank and my favorite restaurant *Taconmadre*, even the liquor store we used to try and get coolers from because our bodies misrepresented our true identities were all beyond range, far off in the distance. Behind me, the church that I prayed to at nights

was slowly in motion away from me. I took a step in God's direction and the building distanced itself. One more step, quietly, hoping to surprise it with my return. The building moved so fast it shook the ground out from under my feet and I fell to my knees.

I look around me, and in every which way I see solitude. I do not belong here. I have been a part of the soil, of the air, of the water in this city for 15 years, and today I am being pushed away, alienated from my surroundings. I bathed in the Gulf of Mexico before I crossed the border, and the same water caressed my feet as I walked the coast of this humid city. The infrastructure is different here though. There are concrete jungles of skyscrapers, intertwined freeways, toll ways, and highways. There are gasoline stations on every corner, and businesses with names that reflect the merging diversity of the city: Washateria (this is where we wash our clothes), Wateria (this is where we buy our water), Liquoreria (guess what we bought here?). And yet today, a distance emerges between what I thought I was a part of, and what I actually am to this city. A foreigner. I kneel on the asphalt sidewalk confused, I feel a sting on my knees. I place my hands over the scrapes and I feel the pain. It goes from my knees to my thighs, crawls up my spine, and digs into my heart. My eyes leak memories of the long and humid Houston summer days, the weekends *en el tianguis*, Tuesdays at Wings and More, *abuelas gorditas de azúcar antes de la misa los domingos*, and of Friday nights at *El Rodeo*, *bailando cumbias hasta el amanecer*.

I could not hear myself cry. I reached up to my neck, it felt stronger than usual. The tips of fingers were numb. The flexibility, the sensibility, the warmth was gone. *Me sentía más pesada, mis movimientos eran abruptos e incontrolables. Y de repente, un dolor agudo detrás de mi cuello que recorría hasta la mitad de mi espalda. Abrí mi boca para gritar del dolor, pero lo único que se escuchaba era silencio.* My head and my arms were thrown back, my stomach pulled up toward the sky, my knees and feet still on the ground, I felt like I was transforming into a beast of the night. But it was day, the sun was out, and I thought I was home. How could this be happening? The last thing I

remembered was touching my face and feeling cold. My woody fingers ran across my lips and I felt the last breath of air sucked out of my body. The last bit of warmth from my lips was gone, and my mouth was delineated with two deep crests on each side that tore deep into me, past my skin and bones and into my core, into my Self. And just like that, I lost control. It crept up on me that sunny morning by the Gulf of Mexico.

I am the ventriloquist's puppet. Working on behalf of another. Adam's³ invisible hand manipulates my actions then tries to define their cause. An individual is always a part of something larger whether he knows it or not: while he thinks "he intends only his own security; he intends only his own gain; and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention" (Smith, 60). The relationship between many individuals reacting to the invisible hand is what makes a market. A market's success is defined by its efficiency and profitability. Buy low, sell high. Cheap labor costs increase profitability, specialization and division of labor increases efficiency, and trade makes "everyone" better off. These ideologies would support the redistribution of low wage, low skilled labor needed to fulfill gaps in the US agricultural industry. And yet after the invisible hand displaces individuals, it tries to accuse them of trespassing.

Skillful management, negotiation, control, or influence can all mean manipulation.

Manipulation can actually be an art excusably practiced by dominating puppets. Ventriloquists add another level of domination over the stringed dummies. They don't only control their every movement, but they actually speak for them as well. I am the ventriloquist's puppet. Without agency, without consciousness, how do I escape the entrapment I *chose* to be a part of?

3 This allusion to Adam's hand refers to the metaphor coined by economist Adam Smith during his interpretation of the market as a system being driven by an invisible hand and describing its relation to forces of self interest, competition, and supply and demand. This is a claim toward the involvement of capitalism as a hegemonic form of oppression that needs to be deconstructed through critical analysis.

September

I am a citizen of a country whose politics reject me, but whose economy calls out for me. I am a citizen because I choose to be one, I'm tired of waiting for the government to approve. I am 17 years old, on paper. But my heart and my spirit are ageless, I refuse the restrictions of numbers, they are only labels of normalization. My name is Emiliana Zapata. You can call me Mili.

On September 18, 1984 I was born into a world of freedom.

On September 18, 1991 I entered the country of freedom.

On September 18, 2001 I realized I had never been free.

A week before my birthday a terrible tragedy 1634 miles away changed my life forever. The terrorist attack on the twin towers caused a ripple effect of intolerance and alienation of anyone who strayed from the normalized society. Anyone part of the “other” was subject to the fervent rage and fear of the American people. I too feared the “other”, until the “other” was me. It was then that I became aware of the effects of intolerance, of misplaced anger and fear. I was conscious of my surroundings for once in my short lived life; I understood that capitalism was not only imperfect, but possibly deadly. My mind had surpassed the Houston city limits, witnessed the after-damage in New York, and gone global. The frontiers of knowledge and critical thinking had opened, and no border was capable of keeping me out or holding me in. And yet 7 days later on my birthday, the idea of what a border was and how it was inevitably intertwined into my livelihood exploded in my face to make its presence heard, and my experience displaced.

The ambient was tense. The days were all gray and a myriad of emotions permeated the air, making it hard to walk through. You had to swim through the confusion, cut through the paranoia with your hands as you walked; it was denser than sunny days after rainy nights during hurricane season on the Gulf Coast. The drive to the grocery store was unordinary. I drove through the community park, the trees swayed with the wind, but the swings stood motionless, stuck in a time where reality was accepting of the “other”, rather than desperately fearing their presence. Acceptance of the “other” came in waves. When unemployment was low, and the fruits needed to be picked Americans were tolerant.

They lived in communion among immigrants because the cheap prices obscured the differences. When unemployment rises, all of the sudden we are trespassers; we are foreign invaders who refuse to learn English. We stop being neighbors and workers when political campaigns are due, we become a problem. Tolerance comes in waves correlated to labor supply and demand, and to political agendas, mainly to money. Immigration Exclusion Acts follow these waves, incentives such as the Bracero's Programs (1942-1964) are erased by Immigration Acts (1965)⁴, concentrating on removing “illegal aliens”, mainly Latinos, from the United States.

I drove by the fire station, the trucks were all washed and ready to go, garage doors open, and the firefighter's parking lot full past capacity. I passed 4 cops in just 3 blocks. I got to the store, clutched the purse under my arm, and locked my car repeatedly. The automatic door opened to what I recognized as pyramids of emergency supplies. I feared the apocalypse was emergent.

Water, canned fruits, batteries, lamps, gas cylinders, matches, ponchos, *veladoras de los santos*, *cruces*, *rosarios*, *comida*, *agua*, *mas comida*, *mas agua*, *velas chicas*, *velas grandes*, *libros de oraciones*, *Biblias*, band aids, alcohol, and Alcohol, scotch tape, and battery radios and TV's, all lined up, stacked up, organized for chaos. The police officer at the door broke my concentration. I jumped at the sound of his voice. He clutched his weapon. “Are you looking for something special?” “No. Well, yes. It's my birthday today, so I guess I was looking for something special.” “You should get what you need and head out.” “Will do.” I felt his heavy gaze on my shoulders as I walked away. I was scared of him, the *gringo* who had sworn to serve and protect me. His blue eyes and blond hair made me uncomfortable that day. The cowboy hat and boots he was wearing looked different on him than they did on *mi papá*, even though they were the same brand. *Mi papa es moreno, y aunque tiene una mirada pesada con coraje, la mirada que me había dado el policía era profundamente diferente. No era la mirada de autoridad, sino una mirada de condena.* The discomfort escalated, the paranoia increased,

⁴ “History of Migration and Immigration Laws in the United States” website. Citation provided in Bibliography.

the tension dampened through the next couple of months.

The war on terrorism broke out short after. The fight for freedom in other countries narrowed American visibility on the rise of intolerance within American borders. The Patriot Act gave rise to state power over individual privacy. The government institutionalized the fear and confusion of American people to strengthen their overarching power. The increasing security measures against all things foreign made legal processing of immigrant documentation come to a complete stop. Since then, the legalization process has been backed up by years. My mother applied for residency almost 18 years ago, and we have yet to hear from INS. The path for legalization for many immigrants was immobilized after 9/11⁵. Complication after complication has driven me apart from my American community. I used to identify as American. Then slowly it became apparent I was different. I compensated with a hyphenation, Mexican-American. Now I check the Mexican box. I'm always tempted to check other, and in the space provided write *India, Mexicana, huérfana, Atravesada, Mujer trilingüe y multicultural, Ttejana, y Mestiza rebelde*, and proud of it! (Anzaldúa would approve.)

5 Tracking systems were established for foreigners on Visas, and more in depth screening for security measures have been established. As of Nov. 22, 2010 legalization paperwork for Mexican immigrants sponsored by a brother or sister, are being processed if they were requested by the date Dec. 22 1995. For China, Dominican, or Indian it is up to the year 2002. Data was collected from the immigration website listed in the bibliography.

¿Mi casa es tu casa, y la tuya, será mía?

Hola. Mi nombre es Elizabeth Vazquez. Soy mujer full-time, and esposa part-time. Me gusta la música, me encanta bailar. Tamaulipeca de nacimiento, Americana por practica, pero mestiza de corazón.

Mucho gusto.

“Alcalde de México muere en Tamaulipas, la violencia escala.”

“Reynosa, Tamaulipas ciudad en la frontera del estado, y de la corrupción.”

“Inmigrantes mueren a las manos de Tamaulipenses.”

“Los zetas matan agentes policiacos. La guerra continua.”

Mi ciudad de nacimiento, la que inspiraba orgullo de ser Mexicana, está muerta según los periódicos. La mataron las drogas, la corrupción, el dinero, los vicios, la mano invisible de Smith⁶. Esa mano que me trajo a los Estados Unidos. Esa mano que me saco de mi casa, empapada de angustia y arrastrando las piernas. Esa maldita mano me arranco la vida, y ni siquiera la conozco. No conozco a nadie que se apellide Smith. La pronunciación del nombre me revuelve las entrañas. Que nombrecito... Se resbala de tu boca con una delicadeza que no existe para los mexicanos. No tiene erres. Y la “t” que tiene, esta acolchonada, devaluada por la “h”, que no la deja ser quien verdaderamente es. Cambia su esencia con simplemente sentarse a su lado. La “t” no se puede defender. Aunque quiera gritar la “h” la calla. La “h” en español es muda, para que no le robe la esencia a nadie. La mano de Smith es mi “h”.

There used to be a *calle del taco* about 3 blocks from my house. We used to walk there on the weekends. A whole street filled with little carts of sizzling fajitas. The red *trompo* meat spinning into perfection. The smell of *chile, tomate, y cebolla* permeated my insides and elevated my senses. I

⁶ Allusion to Adam Smith's coined metaphor, in his book *The Wealth of Nations*, of the invisible hand's control of the market. The invisible hand of the market drives the allocation of resources unofficially, creating a market system that controls the individual.

floated past carts with all kinds of *tamales*. My favorite ones were pink, and had raisins, coconut, and pineapples intertwined with the *maza*. We sat at Alonso's and he served us the usual. My *flautas* were soft, specially made for me, they had lettuce, tomatoes, *queso fresco y crema* adorning their surface. My mouth was in love. I would miss that cheese years later, when all I could find in stores and restaurants was shredded Monterey Jack. That was 18 years ago. Now the carts are all gone, the street is blocked. At 10 pm the street lights turn on to patrol the broken sidewalks, the shattered windows, and the bullet holes on the walls.

I remember the colors of my childhood, and I miss them. I used to feel the breeze, I used to smell the flour blocks away from the bakery on Sunday mornings. My mouth would water all the way to the *pan dulce and bolillos*. I used to taste the salsa, burning my lips and my tongue just enough to keep me interested. I used to see the *verde, blanco, y rojo de mi patria*. I used to hear the accordion's rhythm, it used to feed my senses and bring me to life. Friday nights the sound of *grupos nortños* playing *cumbias* would indulge my body and take over. My arms would twist and turn in complicated improvisations of passion and sensual communication with my dancing partner. The eloquence of rhythmic enlightenment is liberating. He never led me, he liberated me. We swept the *pista*, bodies entangled gracefully. Under him, over me, pulling, pushing, sweating. The pleasure came from exhaustion. We never stopped. Endless hours of elated exhilaration would free me from the patriarchal normality outside this egalitarian practice of deliverance. He wanted me, he chased after me, he lusted for more than the illusion of control that develops when he maps out the movements on the dance floor. He maps, I lead. After he understands the power dynamics have shifted, he accepts and we become one. No longer competing and dominating, just dancing. I could be a woman, feminine or masculine, following or leading. Whatever I wanted to be I was, but by choice rather than sub-conscious coercion; I was elevated and withdrawn from the enslavement of socially constructed and policed gender codes. I had no role to fulfill. Free, I indulged in the pleasure of equality.

I hear no accordions on this side of the border.

But people adapt, that's how we survive.

Friday nights I go to the mall instead. Look at things I want but I can't have.

Then I go home to witness the deprived, acculturated, and defensive man that transformed into a docile body, that now fears the rhythm of the accordion, for it incites straying from the order of normalized society. He says, "The passionate undisciplined movements are to remain in the darkness of the bedroom, they are not natural, they transgress what's proper." "Proper? According to whom?" I ask, but I catch myself, and lower my tone. I can see he is deteriorating from the surface, then inwardly. He polices himself day and night, reads out loud to get rid of his accent, wears suits and ties even when he's going to the grocery store, he stopped dancing with me. His shame is sad, so every day I try to remind him of the man he was before we crossed the border. He gazes away sometimes, looks lost and misplaced, as if searching for something to grasp onto and pull himself out of the misery he is in. I know he is dead on the outside.

UNEARTH

I usually don't do well with introductions. It makes me nervous to describe who I think I am. I guess I can say my name, its Esperanza.

Last Friday, I walked past Victoria's Secret; I noticed the leopard print lingerie through the window. If my mom had been here she would have told me to cover my eyes, just like she did every time the slow song would introduce two people in love during a movie. Only difference now was that I would get the urge to peek. I think that means I lost my innocence.

The two piece suit was so delicately caressing the manikin's body. I fantasized about wearing something so fancy, but my curves would confuse the lace. My body has a tendency to morph everything I put on. The fashion in style is not for Mexican girls like me. They lock me into a mold I simply do not fit. Sometimes I wish there was a Mexican designer/manufacturer who understood our culture and our bodies enough to make something that empowered my curves rather than suppressed them under jeans too low to hug my hips and blouses too tight to let my breasts breathe. Shopping would be more enjoyable if the products that surround us reflected our presence in this country, if the market recognized our needs rather than sucking us dry of our individuality. If we felt we had a say in what was produced, or how, perhaps we would actively participate in our economic system, or support some species of it, rather than wrestling to maintain some control. The reality is that immigrants are victims of the suction of a capitalist vacuum. We were sucked in to a dark abyss filled, surrounded by superficial values.

I caught a glimpse of a thin brunette walking into the store; her hair dropping down to her hips, her lips plump and tinted, her body elevated by an elegant pair of heels. She walked head held high, knowing her body and her wallet could both handle the lacy luxuries of lingerie. I had a sudden urge to

draw. My purse held an empty wallet and a sketchpad. There was a bench where women sat when exhausted from spending, where men sat when exhausted from walking, and where I sat exhausted from dreaming. I began by delineating her perfect body, slowly caressing her figure with the tip of my pencil. I began to dream about embracing her beauty. My finger found itself sliding down the page, over her long heavy hair, along her curves, and down the extent of her legs. My mother would definitely not approve of this. I thought about home and I crumpled the paper into a ball of sin, trying to erase what I had just discovered. The picture was destroyed but my body was still warm and wet.

I walked quickly to my car. I felt suspicious, couldn't find my keys. The night was unusually dark. My tennis shoes failed to walk accordingly; they didn't see the parking bump. I lost balance, but regained it before completely humiliating myself. The white one is mine. I was almost there. The wrong key. Get a hold of yourself. Don't be afraid.

That night, after a long cold shower, I sat in my bed and concluded I had wanted to be *like* her, not be *with* her. I decided I was simply and acceptably another jealous Mexican girl, not a lesbian. It was impossible, that is not how I'd been raised.

In my mother's world a woman felt no such emotions at the sight of another woman. There was a lens through which women were seen and explored, and that lens had no room for admiration. Perhaps I was seeing things from a different lens. Perhaps I could see the essence of a woman independently from her relationship to a man, or to the materialistic objects that surround her. I could see a pure body and mind, and I found it admirable. There was nothing wrong with recognizing the inherent beauty of a woman, maybe now I could look at myself through that lens and be proud. Maybe I could see hands and see strength rather than manliness. Maybe I can see possibilities rather than restrictions.

The city of angels had suddenly opened my eyes to a world of awareness that disturbed my comfortable numbness. A lens cleared my vision and raised my consciousness to the surface.

Consciousness was uncomfortable, not to mention dangerous. Realizing you have been abused and marginalized means you have to question conformity. The insensibility that the plurality benefits from can no longer blind you from the painful truth. The anesthesia wears off, and you are left vulnerable. It had been difficult to physically walk out of the classroom from a school that subjugated my knowledge through instituted norms that led to the social policing of actions. The institution branded me with a tag that read “non-native”. The tag was invisible yet always present, burning into my skin an imaginary yet physically confining feeling of impotence. When you are conscious you feel the burn, when you conform, you have no time to feel anything. I walked out of the classroom on a rainy afternoon in Texas; I stood motionless for 15 minutes, hair soaking wet, wasting time that had been so meticulously time-tabled. I would no longer abide silently; a quest for a plausible alternative had been incited.

One must embark on a inquiry for answers that are hidden from the reach of normalized society. The answers are stocked away on shelves too high and too expensive for the wallets of the immigrant worker. To consciously stray from the plurality you must make an impassive choice. I realized that day I had been alive on the surface, meticulously slaving away, yet I had been dead on the inside. Regret, anger, ambition, and pleasure had grappled within, they pushed, and pulled, and twisted my insides until I had been left numb. That is how I had survived. I had numbed my pain and my joy. I numbed my victories and my failures, and considered the quest a success for the simple reason that I was taught to be happy just to be alive.

Every time the thought of questioning authority, or the desire to be part of a political demonstration, or the idea of applying for a job that paid with checks instead of cash crept up on me, my *tías* would smash them down with their colorful *matamoscas* they had bought for a dollar at the *tianguis*. My mother was easily impressionable. “Di onli way tu be save is to estay under the table. *O la chingadera esa pa mirar los chotas, como se llama? La radar.*”

Hiding was the solution to keep from deportation. How was I to show my support, to speak up

for my *Raza* if I had to hide like a cockroach scared of being Raid-ed? I couldn't think I was Mexican, because the *chotas* would smell it on me, and then I would ruin all my family's hard work.

The shoes on my feet were cuffs holding me down. The books in my backpack held me captive. The brands, the cars, the food on the table were decorating the bars of captivity. I was withering away in a golden cage, crying silently for the values, traditions, the love that was stripped from me. Even if life was a daily paranoia, I must be grateful. “*¡Dale gracias a Dios que estas aquí!*” *Eso me decían, y es lo que hacía.* “*Si te pegan en la cara, voltea y ponles la otra mejilla.*” *Nunca fui rebelde, ni cuando estaba de moda. La rebeldía parecía ser para los que no tenían padres, o los que buscaban atención de mas por que les faltaba amor o ternura que calmara la turbulencia que algunos cargan internamente. Como yo tenía padres, y nunca descifre lo que significaba el querer atención, me escondía en las sombras de la normalidad, bajo las reglas y el miedo de la diferencia.*

The humidity must have soaked up any awareness I possessed because I was as blind as a bat for years until I crossed over the border again. This time it was west, not north. I'd like to give route 66 a try, maybe I could rewrite the Grapes of Wrath. I wasn't looking for 500 a year, just a room of my own⁷. A room where I did not have to worry about the clothes on my back being too colorful, too blatantly different, too Mexican, for the American eye, always judging, always “other-ing” away. I needed a room where I did not have to worry about having the house clean for my husband and his buddies when they came home from work. A room where I saw the man I loved instead of the man I took care of, or the man I left my career for, or the man I had a child for, or the man I envied. He could get up in the morning and walk out the brown wooden door and into a world outside of his contract with his family. I stayed and lived the contract day and night, even in my dreams I was a wife and a

⁷ In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf describes that a woman needs a room of her own to develop her true Self, as a creative writer and apart from patriarchal forms of oppression that hinder women's advancement. In this piece, a room of my own is of parallel significance, in that it provides a safe place for reflection and empowerment in a journey for self-discovery.

mother, a woman identified by her relationship to her surroundings. I needed a room where I was not only a wife or a mother. A room where I did not have to cook for anyone but for my own appetite, and what my tongue craved for. I needed a room where my fear and respect for the culture, traditions, roles, or responsibilities drilled into my daily chores would be overcome, and my body would free itself from docility, while my mind would free itself from expectations. I need a room of my own. Maybe here in a foreign land once again, in the borderlands of the unknown I would find what I needed to not only survive, but now actually live. The Spanish billboards and street names, the murals and day laborer centers, the consciousness raising, the green trash cans, the bikes and the skateboards were all new to me. The question of identity was blatantly flashing as soon as you traveled into the sea of lights resting below the mountains. People declared themselves in LA, and I had never even looked at myself in a mirror.

I avoided my reflection, never looked into my own eyes, for they might have had something to say. A cone narrowed my vision towards survival; anything else was nonexistent, unnecessary and burdening. It took time, patience, and papers to question yourself or anyone else for that matter. I had neither.

Chicana? Latina? Hyphenated? Straight? Shaken or stirred? Low fat? Decaff? Organic? Single, Widowed, or Enslaved? Liberal? Leftist? Demo or Repo? (It took me a while to decipher that political affiliations could be a modern declaration of independence). Queer? Tranny? How do you define? How do you identify?

The alternatives were overwhelming, and here I had been thinking there was only one way all along. Identity was a choice not a burden. The point was not to categorize yourself into marginalization, but to recognize, accept, and empower your Self. The possibilities seemed endless. Happiness had only been 3000 miles west of the repressive numbness.

Cesar Chavez was a stranger to me. The field, the picking fruit, the murals, the language,

Nahuatl, Azteca, the zapatistas were all strangers. The ignorance devalued my *Mexicanidad*. For me chicanos were cholos, with their low riders, their dickies and converse, their pitbulls creeping through dark alleys, their loud girlfriends with crunchy curly hair, and vividly delineated lipstick and eyeliner. Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit*⁸ re-integrated me with the family I had “othered” so willingly.

It is hard to avoid the whispers of normalized figures of authority. My mother had drilled into my heart the idea that in order to escape the discrimination and inferiority of a criminalized immigrant status, I must marry a white guy. A citizen. My friends incessantly commented on the fact that I should never drive, never solicit employment, never go to the clubs where they ask for ID. They “advised” me endlessly to keep away from the police. Anyone in uniform was frightening. Uniforms were instantly associated with government institutions, and the government did not want us here. One time I dropped my sister off at the movies with a guy that had been after her for a while. 45 minutes later she was sobbing on the phone pleading me to come get her quickly. The 16 year old boy had pinned her against the wall in a dark hallway, and had forced his hand into her. She had tried screaming for help, but he threatened her by asking the question that all immigrants fear, “Do you really want the cops involved?” He knew her legal status. He told her he could have her deported, so it was best if she'd shut her mouth and opened her legs. She bit his lip so hard he probably regretted those words, and now she waited for me in the women's restroom of the theatre. The one place she felt she wasn't vulnerable or different. The one place women could fart and not be judged. Unless there were other women so deeply rooted into an ideal femininity, that even in privacy she felt policed, and suppressed human nature in the name of a superficial delicacy imposed my patriarchy.

She hadn't called the cops. I clenched the wheel between my palms, but drove at the speed limit.

8 Luis Valdez created the first Chicano play to be on Broadway. It was a fictionalized version of the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial. The play addresses issues of stereotypes against a marginalized community of Mexican-Americans. The play is historically contextualized in the World War II era, when the Zoot Suit riots broke out in Los Angeles, which evolved throughout the nation targeting Mexican-Americans.

I too was afraid of uniforms. It was an internalized fear, constantly yet subtly infiltrating every decision we made. It was a form of oppression framed by panopticons⁹ that divide and conquer. Marginalize and oppress.

When you are an immigrant there is an understanding, however unfair, that you do not belong. When I go to the corner store to buy some milk I am scared. I am scared there will be a cop, and I will end up in Mexico in a matter of days. When I pass through any metal detector, I am scared. I am afraid the vigilant eyes of those judging will see my alienness and punish me. I am scared day and night. My solution, I hide. I stay away from metal detectors, from the post office (I feel every government institution is somehow connected). I avoid the doctor, the banks, anyplace they run your credit (because they'll ask the question that makes immigrants retract into a comfort shell unseen, social security number?). I withdraw to survive because I am afraid of the eyes watching me.

Without a place for resistance the fight is over before one ever realizes it had started. I was now aware that the rules of normality had kept me silently abiding, conforming into a bystander at first, and then a puppet. A brown wooden puppet, hands dangling from my elbows, knees dancing to the sound of mariachis. A white skirt with ruffles, red and green ribbon wrapped into the braids that amuse the public. An audience scrutinizing my foreign figure. "Make her curvier, like the authentic ones." "Yea, and add some leather sandals, the handmade ones." "She needs a zarape, you know those colorful cloths to hold all her fatherless babies to her back." For long I had been constrained into a role that society identified for Mexicans like me. Immigrants from a foreign country, ignorant, and easily scared into molds carved out and decorated for all those *gringos* that loved the tacos and handmade tortillas we all knew. My mother never knew how to make tortillas from scratch, neither did I. But in an attempt

9 Foucault's theory of discipline through social policing is one of the most recognized theories on power relations. In his work, *Discipline and Punishment*, he compares a correctional structure of a panopticon to modern society. He describes how disciplinary punishment by an institution leads to self-policing even when the "guard" is not visible. This form of power exertion is comparable to the power exerted by ICE on the lives of undocumented immigrants. United States' Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency has tormented the existence of immigrants through unjust raids and policies. The self-policing of immigrants is a self imposed form of oppression caused by fear of this state institution.

to defend my *Mexicanidad*, I would improvise answers to questions of heritage and authenticity so politely asked by ignorant *gueros*. And you thought the idea of freedom came with no strings attached.

Now I want to scream out that I am not a puppet! But how, if I've never had a voice of my own? How can I cry out for freedom? It cannot. First, declare I am no puppet. I will pull out from the grave the person I thought would never get an opportunity to live. I myself have let society bury her; I must dig her up, and give her life.

Desnudandome el día de mi Raza¹⁰.

Adivina adivinador,

Soy blanca y te hago llorar.

Mis capas esconden mi realidad.

Pero si me desnudas

Bajo la tempestad,

Desaparezco.

Exprime mis jugos agrios,

Derrama llanto.

Toca mis labios,

escucha mi canto.

Sola no puedo demostrarte

de lo que puedo ser capaz,

pero acompañada

mis logros nunca olvidarás.

Respuesta: La cebolla y la mujer.

¹⁰ *El día de la Raza* is originally a celebration of Columbus's arrival at the Americas. After critique of the exploitation of colonization the holiday took on an activist celebration of multi-ethnicity. The aftermath of an exploitive event is embraced as the birth of the different races, languages, and traditions. It is an empowering act of self assertion. Anzaldúa describes her celebration as recognition of the small things in life that make up her Mexican identity, and can sometimes be overlooked in the daily struggles of living in a country where the dominant group discourages the embrace of multi-ethnic cultures and traditions.

Ciao. Soy Xochitl. Estoy perdidamente enamorada de un amor imposible y en busca de respuestas que no aparecen fácilmente. Tengo 23 años y ésta es mi historia...

Mi abuela dice que en un refrigerador mexicano nunca puede faltar el chile, tomate, y cebolla. No me preocupa, nunca tendré un refri mexicano. Porque mi esposo tendrá que ser güero, de ojos azules, que respire aire americano y se le antojen las hamburguesas en vez de las tortas. Mi destino y felicidad están escritos en la ciudadanía de un hombre extraño a mi cultura, y a mis deseos.

My nails are digging deep into the love lines in my hands, the life lines, the finance lines, the lines of lust, of pain, of hunger and superstition. The physical pain numbed the heartache. The tears were pointless. I was a woman; I cried, I loved and failed and cried again. That was life. My father's words were meaningless in the face of applicable situations, I wanted to humiliate myself and fall to my knees like he warned me not to. Critical of my mother's emotional inferiority, I swore to stay distant from the enslavement of blind love towards prideful Mexican men. When I was 12, I mapped out my life priorities; career establishment would take my youth and push me into the position of power I craved for from my trailer house window. In the midst of the longest night of my life, the only thing on my mind was love. An abstract illusion of unidentified, ungraspable logic. The only thing on his mind was papers. Nine insignificant numbers, combined to form the most desirable possession for immigrant men. More desirable than love, than happiness, than me. My eyes stared at his strong back, shaped from shoveling cement and hammering nails. My voice called out his name in attempt to inspire the memories that would agonize me for the rest of my life. His back, his dark strong back, disappeared into shadows of the night, and he transformed into the beast that would haunt my nightmares for years to come. Last night I had cried tears of passionate happiness, my body shivering from spasms of love rushing into my tunnel of life. My nails had dug into that strong, brown back and imprinted my love on

his body. He breathed life into me every time he penetrated. Our souls elevated themselves from our bed and gracefully intertwined into a sphere of purity. Today my soul left my body running after her one true mate. She cared not about borders or documentation. She understood no restrictions to happiness; she understood fate and was oblivious to the mundane pains of money and politics.

He had stepped up and declared the unreasonableness of two immigrants falling in love. It was foolish and irresponsible. If we had chosen to let our love unfurl we would have been maiming our futures, and condemning the fruit of our loins to a life of discrimination and struggle. We were here to be successful, to make money to cure our childhood traumas and sate our thirst for superiority. How arrogant was survival. The only intimacy I knew after he left me, was the lust for luxuries I accumulated hoping he would return one day. Maybe if he thought it would cure the disease of the *mojado*, he could appreciate the essence buried under socially constructed layers of oppression.

The disease of the *mojado* is the entrapment of all our efforts into desired materialistic survival, accumulation of capital that is valuable because Americans tell us it is. The *mojada* looks for survival wherever she can find it, but then is distracted by her lack of luxuries and her difference. She is thrown into conflicting ideologies, to reject or to forfeit. Either leaves her vulnerable and subject to rejection, by her people or her hosts. Money is what pulls immigrants in, and what pushes us out at the same time. We traveled so far and risked our lives, might as well go all out, indulge in the capitalist temptations. But no, we can't. Because the Mexican blood that runs through our veins is still warm, and because the pictures of our hometown and our families back home are vividly engraved into our hearts, we struggle to reject forfeit. The immigrant is stuck between the present and the past unable to move in any direction for fear of disappointing anyone.

Mi alma necesitaba su calor. Necesitaba apretar su cuerpo entre mis piernas. Vacía. Sin llanto, sin amor, y sin espíritu me quede arrodillada en el vacío de la soledad. Cuantas fronteras tendré que transcender hasta poder encontrar la felicidad, mi esencia, mi destino. Tal vez la única solución es una

nueva consciencia.

Gloria tenía razón: “Es difícil differentiating between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto.

She puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces that we as a race, as a women, have been a part of.” Tengo que “bota[r] lo que no vale, los desmientes, los desencantos, el embrutecimiento. Aguarda[r] el juicio, honrado y enraizado, de la gente antigua” (Anzaldúa, 259). Me paro en frente del espejo in a room of my own, dispuesta a desnudarme hasta el centro de mi Ser, en busca de mi consciencia mestiza¹¹.

The floor shook, the walls trembled, the windows rattled, the mirror shuddered, but my reflection stood *enraizada, como un tronco seguro de su lugar en el mundo*. My reflection stared into my soul and withdrew from it my essence, displaying it tauntingly two feet away from me but unreachable. My hands reacted to this invitation and my mind began a journey towards self-discovery, an external introspection that would confess my experience within and declare its validity. The buttons on my shirt were ripped off one by one, releasing the countless discriminating stares, and the debasing remarks I had suffered. Every moment of self-doubt and social devaluation came off when I unwrapped the entangling red scarf from my neck. The jewelry that deformed my brown face with its representation of the false value of materialistic lust was ripped from my body liberating the caring common woman inside. Competition is overrated; the true form of victory lies in coexistence. My pants fell to my ankles and exposed the truth I had ignored and repressed for so many years. I am La Malinche, ripped between two worlds, each fighting to disown me. *Nehuatl Notoka Cihuatl*. I am

11 Gloria Anzaldúa empowers the mestiza identity put forward by Jose Vasconcelos, a Mexican philosopher (Borderlands, 99). It is a hybrid identity, “a malleable species with with a rich gene pool...from this racial, ideological, cultural, and biological cross polinization, an alien consciosness is presently in the making-a new mestiza conciosness, una consciencia de mujer.” It is this multi-layered consciosness that must empowered by the marginalized woman in order to establish within herself a sense of agency.

Tonantzin Guadalupe. La dicotomía¹² se invierte, no soy virgen, no soy puta, soy mujer. I lay bare my new consciousness and for the first time, I discovered, I accepted, I declared my identity.

I am what I see myself being. No longer binded behind the masquerade of imposed roles, I will choose what to put on a daily basis. I will be the director of my own performativity, no longer performing a prescribed act: if our identity, as immigrant women is “instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment, which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief”(Butler, 520). I am with Butler when I say we must break away from those repetitive actions that bind us unknowingly into performed social identities. We have a choice, we must realize that, and take into our own hands our transformation into active Mestizas who direct their performativity with eyes wide open.

12 The virgin-whore dichotomy, as addressed in Chicana Feminism, delves into patriarchal notions of what defines proper womanhood. There are two iconic women figures in the historical development of what is desirable and undesirable for a Chicana. The first is the veneration of *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, the national saint of Mexico; the other is the figure of La Malinche, an indigenous woman who was thought to have facilitated the conquest of Mexico by Hernán Cortés in the 15th and 16th century. La Malinche served as translator and mediator in the negotiations that led to the defeat the Aztec leader Montezuma in 1519. The Virgin of Guadalupe embodied the righteousness, the piety, dedication, humbleness, selflessness, dedication to family, and virginity that the proper woman should embrace. On the other hand, La Malinche signifies the sexual promiscuity, the lying, the treachery and the deceitfulness that a respectable woman should refrain from. Although other cultures usually describe this distinction between women as a "virgin-whore" dichotomy, in Mexican or Chicano culture the dichotomy is tied specifically to these two historical figures.

Revolution?

Anonymous immigrant writer. Ageless. Could be a woman, could be a man, a child, a lesbian, a straight catholic, a chicana, a Mexican, an American, a feminist mestiza, a *huérfana*, a housewife, a survivor, a dreamer, or a any combination of...

In the face of oppression people react. You stand up for yourself or you cave in. A silent retreat into the darkness leaves you vulnerable, but safe. By accepting the rejection enforced by the dominant group, whether white, rich, straight, male, or with any blend of the various idolized characteristics, you victimize yourself. Fear can be normal, an instinct, a natural reaction, but evasion is a choice.

For years the theory has dominated the realm of revolution. Some classrooms serve to analyze, to discuss, to promote or disable power relations found in our social environment, in our political institutions, and in our familial relationships. You may read the theorists that provide plans to escape oppression. You may come across Marx, but you hesitate to absorb, or to critically question, because an alternative to your lived experience as a practitioner of capitalism is unimaginable. An alternative to your perception of reality is impossible, and if attainable then simply inexcusably wrong. The epistemologies are validated by committees; the scholars recognize the scholars. The pedagogy is not usually questioned. The ideal is perpetuated, and the “others” are studied, observed and dissected in order to stir up the spirit of community service. Youth attempt to emerge in projects of revitalization, but from a touristic¹³ perspective, at most with an explorers ideology. The lens through which awareness is addressed is tainted by privilege or obscured by normalization. The issue is incessant. A continual cycle of oppression derives from the manner of coexisting with the “other.”

The immigrant's movement is not simply about a path toward legalization. It is a fight against the uninformed perceptions. It is an internal struggle to calm the turmoil caused by shame and doubt

13 Mohanty describes three different types of feminism, "feminist as a tourist," "feminist as an explorer, and "feminist solidarity." The feminist as a tourist is also described as the "white women's burden or colonial discourse model." The feminist as a tourist looks at problems of oppression from a privileged western perspective, and with intentions only to address the issues superficially scraping on the surface, then returning to their normalized ideologies and practices.

from not fitting in, by fear of those dressed in uniforms, by fear of owning up to our own desires for they might contradict our traditions and values. It is ok to change, we are a new people. We do not have to pick and choose what we must embrace and what we must reject. Immigrants reject acculturation with pride because we will not be robbed of our history, of our culture, of our language. We will not sell out. We will not disappear. Things are not just black or white, they can be brown. We can mix our multi-ethnicity, our multi-cultures; we can be bilingual or trilingual, and be proud of it. We can wear a *Cruz Azul* soccer jersey and Jordans, we can listen to Ramón Ayala and the Beatles. We can dance both the electric slide and *El Caballo Dorado* at *Quinceañeras*. We can live borderless.

Power has been institutionalized, intertwined with capitalism and manufactured into the hand of those that can afford it. John Holloway poses a million dollar question, “how can maimed, dehumanized, alienated people possibly create a liberated human society” (Holloway)? The immigrant community cannot vote themselves into power; they cannot elect a person to speak up them. They cannot take the power from the nation state. They may embody the nation state. By forming social relations, establishing individual agency, and practicing human dignity free from power relations, individuals can lead an internal revolution toward a deconstruction of layers of social dichotomization. Others may find their struggle worth 20 hours a week, maybe 40, but without the constant reminder that you are alien, that you are a criminal, it is hard to fully engage in a struggle that is not inherently yours. The development of social human capital¹⁴ is nonetheless important, but my attention is directed toward the question of the possibility of a revolution by the people marginalized, for the people marginalized. A revolution not intended to steal power, but in search of liberation. We feel the need to be liberated from the imposed roles, from the stereotypical assumptions, from the pre-supposed ideas of who we are and what we’re here for. I am not a criminal. “Alienation signals not only the urgency but

14 The idea of social capital is explored by Valenzuela in his book *Subtractive Schooling*. He refers to the accumulation of human capital as a positive system of networking that provides socially valued resources and opportunities.

also, apparently, the impossibility of revolutionary change” (Holloway, 46). I refuse your name for me. I am not an alien. I am not a trespasser, an invader, or a villain.

I am the classmate you seek for tutoring, the friend you call when you need a shoulder to cry on. I am the student that questions the theory, the neighbor that makes carne asada's and has you over for a drink. I am the woman who raises your kids, the man who rebuilds your house. I am your accountant. I am your dry-cleaner and your lawyer at the same time. I am all around you. I work for you, you work for me, we work together. I may live in the borderlands, but the borderlands have evolved into your daily lives as well. Remove the blindfolds of the normalized myopia and take a look around. To understand reality you must be willing to accept, learn the theory, but live the truth.

Rejection of the established conservative ideology of valuation in a capitalist society is needed in order to develop an empowering process toward self-determination. Value can be given regardless of monetary significance. I can say that a *piñata* is worth more to me than an iPod, because it has cultural, personal, and traditional value. I can reframe my economics to reflect my hybrid identity, and reject the prescribed rational imposed by the market. I will not trade my *piñata* for your iPod, or my *tamales* for your turkey; I will make turkey *tamales* and call them *turmales*!

An internal revolution between the two worlds that tear the immigrant apart must take place, before he or she can be free. The country we idolize rejects us for trespassing. The country we reminisce rejects us for traitors. We are legally neither's, but emotionally embrace both. To engage in a fight between the two would result in the deformation of the person we have evolved into. Just as our tongue, our style, and our food have evolved so will our soul and our consciousness. We must evolve into a hybrid breed. We must take apart the fear and embrace our pride. We must validate our culture, our traditions, and we must let our tongues free. “Labels are for filing. Labels are for clothing. Labels are not for people” (Martina Navratilova). Tear that uncomfortable label off. Rip it from your daily lives, and declare your individuality. Being an immigrant is not a career, it is not an occupation, or a

livelihood. Define yourself. Discover your identity and declare it out loud. Self-Emancipate. Write it down and sign it, make it official. Then sing it, dance it, taste it, and celebrate it. It lives inside all of us; you just have to dig it out. Resurrect.

“The novel indicated that we are becoming. There is no final solution. There is no last word.”

- Carlos Fuentes

“Strip in front of a mirror and liberate yourself. Self Emancipate.”

- Cynthia Ortega

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