

A Chicano's Poetic Exploration:

Usando mi autohistoria-teoría para ver los lobos, correr con los coyotes, y vivir como el zorro

E. Fidel Ramirez

**I am theory!**

During the summer, the fans blew air all night through the house of my grandmother Concepción. Now, en la madrugada, the cool of the air made us shiver. My father, Lázaro, would begin with a shower and a shave, splashing Aramis aftershave on and rubbing Vitalis in his hair. Sally—my mom—would peel the potatoes, heat the pans and get the tortillas ready over the stove, gas burners adding a hint of odor to the still morning air. Después de la primera taza de café, chorizo, potatoes, and egg tacos were wrapped in paper towels and thin sheets of aluminum. We would then venture out on the road. We were always awake hours before the chicharras began their morning screams and on the road before the sun was even peeking in to my grandmothers front windows. We would take US 77 North, never arriving at a place to stay, but pausing momentarily in our life journey (Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, & Vélez, 2012; Rivera, 1992).

As Benito had taught him in his youth as a migrant, this was how you traveled. I am not a migrant; however, my father's career in the Army required many moves. I learned from him early in life that you could traverse long distances in the dark morning while it is still cool. You can avoid the heat of the day, and extra stress on your car, with a stop in the early afternoon. Through conversation, sharing, cooperation, and exploration, together as pilot and navigator, we found our paths and arrived as a family; we developed our relationship on these travels. As we grew older, this relationship evolved. In our journey as educators, we have only ever taken one course together and never worked in the same department at the same time. Throughout our careers, we have continued to converse, share, cooperate, and explore. He is a partner on my every path (Jago, 1996). My most influential teacher (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2015), it is his guidance that encourages my persistence against the structure of education yet to develop an appreciation for learning and knowledge.

The path I now follow enjoins me as a disciple in academia. Primarily a teacher, I am now a faculty member in Mexican American Studies. The first and last faculty member hired solely for this teaching role at the University of Texas Pan American, I was also the first hired solely for this purpose at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. This is my path and destiny, the result of a childhood inspired by family activism that allowed this for me—mi apá y mi tío en el movimiento. I have my own path in activism—en la lucha por mis estudiantes, serving them as an academic and against the very same.

As a Chicano, I too must daily weave through a bullying and hegemonic structure that places borders to head off our progress in the academy. In opposition to the controlling structure of the Ivory Tower, my cultural and family foundations shape an ontology, epistemology, and

axiology which attempts to rebuild the dismantled road to knowledge in a Chicano/Pocho stylism. I ground this stylism in my axiological belief of service, an epistemological belief that this work is an investment in liberation, and that ontologically this work is about removing those walls to our advancement.

Just as Wordsworth used *The Prelude*, I here use poetry to explicate my life and work, changing both of us in the product and process. The poem below is the heart of my argument and the data around which I centered my doctoral dissertation. As leaders in the field of education, the future only has purpose and meaning if we are aware of our past. Through this poem, I take the privilege to dominate and declare both my position and purpose. It is my explanation of everything about me. This poem is a political statement about my identity, rejecting the limitations of our hegemonic society. Furthermore, it is a pedagogical tool which allows me to relate to my students and for them to relate to me, to understand that our identities are complex and that we are always in a process of discovery.

This poem encourages you who read to suspend your understanding of academia, shaped in a paradigm of scientism, and to value and study your own story in parallel with my own (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2015; Torres, Guajardo, Guajardo, & Ramirez, 2015; Wilson, 2008). As you will come to understand, I appear to reject everything we do in academia. However, I only reject the very elements of scientism, humanism, and scholasticism that would reject me. I am theory—my spirituality evolves from the culture of relationships (Wilson, 2008). I venerate my thoughts, the echo of internal discourse. Judeo-Islamic-Christianity precepts stipulate that at the dawn of human existence, there was only the Word, the dialogue of life. I therefore define my life in this form.

My epic poem provides a realization of a Chicano experience in higher education. It is both humanizing and validates a different ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Brayboy, 2005; Kaomea, 2009; Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2010). It is a means by which to displace Western Eurocentric ideologies and connect us, storyteller and listener, by privileging the relationship that exists between us rather than the information that is exchanged (Bishop, 2011; Smith, 2012). I am an academic and I am a Chicano, they are not mutually exclusive, and I exist in more than one place and more than one time (Cooper, 1987; De La Torre & Zúñiga, 2013; Ortiz, 1983; Willis & Murphy-Shingematsu, 2009).

I stumbled on the words of Corky Gonzales through my academic experience. I wasn't naïve to the poem but to the message. I had been ignorant though my choice to look at other works and to ignore the poignancy of the message in its method of delivery. But I took the poem and read it, several times. Many years ago now, speaking with my father about Corky I learned more about my father and his work in el movimiento aquí en el sur de Tejas. But these words stirred silently in my soul and my mind for years as an influence and key to my actions. It shapes my thoughts and has led me to a deeper understanding of who I am. More importantly, it gave me the framework from which to write my own poem, developed stylistically in the form of *Yo Soy Joaquín*. This is my homage and tribute to Corky and my own exploration of what it means to be Chicano today, in academia, as a colonized and deculturalized man attempting to be,

reclaim, and teach Chicana studies in an environment that purports to support democracy and freedom but stands as the bastion of neither in the context of life today.

### **I am the word!**

[I]

I am Theory,  
absent from our statements of discovery,  
trapped in the constraints of  
western hegemonic thoughts,  
I cogitate and become obfuscated by...  
the freedom of research,  
No... suppressed by standards,  
and destroyed by the graces of these freeing elements, by the desire to be.

Estoy perdido  
the map is wrong  
the true path has been marked con pedacitos de tortilla,  
do my nepantlero guides  
take me to my proper place – researcher?  
or to the proper place – Researcher?  
turning from the path lit by Society I face Famine  
Turned from the path lit by Society and I obtain desolation

I am Antonio Márez y Luna  
I question, I am in place, of this place, for this place  
To Forgive, to be forgiven, to examine or remain unexamined.  
To consider justice or to be its tool? I see and learn to share what I know  
I am the Bruja, I scream as the lechuza and draw the coldness in your blood  
I am the Curandero to fight this battle, to win your heart and I stand to heal the rest  
I leave the shelter of my mother, excited and sad  
Standing at the crossroads I seek and give blessings

Soy Guálinto  
Mi nombre... delivered in the diminutive,  
in the Gringo style  
I fight against it, taking the tack of pride in the cultural promises of the Spanish moniker.  
Praised for jumping their hoops in the educational structure  
remanded to second class status in their other realms.  
Pushed to accept Americanization  
to become gringo

también soy Joaquín  
Progress and pride, Science and faith  
peón y Bracero  
Deliverer and tyrant  
Indígena y mestizo  
Present, past, and future  
One in the tree of life  
¡teoría en la carne!

y Esperanza  
I am the urban dweller  
I move from house to house  
My hips ready, spreading, prepared to hold my child, I walk and practice  
‘horita, sentado con mi codo restando,  
peering through la ventanita  
I see not what I have missed becoming  
but what I become

I am unashamed as the boy under the house,  
I have forgotten the period of time  
I have remembered the separation  
Who is calling I wonder,  
Should I ask why instead?  
I drank the water - no one else was there.  
I remember so that my history is honored  
I remember in reflexión - so I exist

y soy orgulloso que soy Benancio  
I am the Bracero en santander  
Experiencing burns in the desenraíze por la gloria de los gringos mendigos  
In my political evangelism I am isolated by those closest to me - I fight against withdrawal.  
Quiero a mi México lindo  
Tengo mi amor aquí y no regresas  
Pero mis hijos no saben dónde estoy enterrado.  
I am that ghost that circles la placita

soy enamorado de mi angie luna,  
her breasts – round, supple and large are nourishment and the promise of comfort  
mi querida Mexicana  
this is not a fiery passion that burns out  
it is the love affair of commitment  
she prizes my heart and mind – keeps me teetering toward mi Atzlan more than gringolandia  
She accepts my pochismos, im not gringo yet - for her I keep true.

and I am adored by Delgadina

I obey the struggle of power and love to know it, but reject it to love her more  
I disobey the rules of man for the sake of her freedom from tyranny and abuse  
I make others see the degradation and loss  
of abuse and subjugation  
which we perpetrate on those we claim to cherish most  
I bring intersectionality to the narratives creators  
to know their privileges as males with a males language.

por los tres marias y por todos los hijos de La Chingada como yo,  
estoy aquí  
haciendo este trabajo  
guided by Sor Juana's pen, weeping the tears of Tonantzin  
my dismembered Coyolxauhqui  
re-formed by Doña Marina  
Lola's value is constrained  
by the self-deprecation Richard so happily displays

[II]

I am the  
coyote  
Beaner  
Nepantlero  
Pollito  
Vendido  
Patrón  
Mexican-American

Soy  
Gloria  
Sofia, Minerva, Antonia, María y Richard  
Dolores, Gerardo, Alfredo, Octavio y Rudy  
Aída, Enrique, Guadalupe, Linda y Tara  
Don Américo, Laura, Tomás, Angela y José  
Marcos, Daniel, Eduardo, Enrique y Luis  
Cherríe

I am the living flesh  
subject not object  
soy la frontera  
pláticas  
ontología, epistemología, axiología y la metodología  
Indoctrinated, eurocentric viewpoint marginalizes the Indigenous  
Chican@ epistemology, I am legitimacy - I am steadfast  
I am

when I, the Gachupín controls  
I structure institutions and organizations,  
I shape interactions between leaders and subordinates,  
I dictate the perspective required of the studied and the researcher  
When I, tlayacanqui relate to our people  
We complement stability within the perceived disarray of life  
through reflexión to recognize and practice the layers of shifting realities  
obligated to respecting other beings within our community of relations.

Hispanic, I claim neutrality  
I take no political stance on what is learned because one does not exist  
What I know is applied to all  
I now know what will happen and how to shape it  
Native, I claim you, me, us, them, that, all  
I take a stance that we are responsible to each other  
we make each other Safe - Sharing our speech to move our hearts and Honoring our narratives  
with reliability we develop our mind, heart, soul and spirit as one - I privilege our subjectivity

I have been studied and defined in western thought through the eyes of  
Descartes, Horkheimer, Habermas, and Bell  
The lens I use, still unfocused with earlier influence, improved when ground by  
Delgado Bernal, Perez Huber, Solórzano, and Yosso  
I know it is now more than the lens,  
Brayboy taught me that light moves both ways and shapes my views accordingly  
Bishop, Smith, and Wilson promoted a truth, viewed and viewer are looking at each other,  
simultaneously sharing roles.

I recognize systems of oppression – colonization  
power  
I privilege relationship rather than information exchanged  
relating to each other and the world gives context to our stories  
We seek holistic healing of the body, mind, and spirit  
We share a process of critical reflection that emphasizes social adequacy and well being  
healing spirituality and privileging the sacred reality of life is a cyclical process rather than linear  
our existence is never final or complete but enters new iterations

Geertz told me to use thick description to learn, Spindler  
tells me to engage the dialogue of action, to reduce that dialogue to understand the culture  
But I am Garza, Reyes, and Trueba, I resist the hegemonic purpose to just understand,  
instead designing to cause change  
I am Noblit, Flores, and Murillo, I have shared the importance of positionality and reflexivity  
I have been resisting since I was Francisco Tenamaztle and Fray Cristobal de las Casas.  
I continued to resist as George Sanchez and Ernesto Galarza  
I am the mojadito who addresses colonization, liminality, positionality, and history

I resist to privilege story, plática, yarns, narrative, and dialogue to teach and know  
My resistance is what makes my work of value  
I come from the frontera, a third space marginalized population and “othered”  
Mi historia privileges not the western textbook pattern of knowledge transference,  
instead my spiritual and indigenous ways of knowing  
I privilege my relationship with my parents, for what is important – a good life  
family values and responsibility to previous generations and older siblings...  
creates the foundation upon which the humanity of the individual is shaped

I am the process and product of research.  
I am the word made flesh, the producer of speech by which I now shape the narrative  
A resident of the land I was treated as an illegal in gringolandia  
Now in the reclaimed Aztlán of my people I reject the white dominant perspective  
On the importance of the process of data collection,  
de la axiología de mi gente, the perspective of the human condition is most important  
It is with this ethical guideline in place that I serve as an emancipatory tool  
para mis colegas, para mi familia, y para mi comunidad

ontología  
power differentials due to location, ethnicity and immigration status  
epistemología  
knowledge acquisition leads to liberation and voice production  
axiología  
seek not to just identify what exists in the nature of study,  
improve the context in which the data is collected,  
remove barriers that exist, and seek justice

metodología  
testimonios draw the researcher and participant together  
testimonios, extend beyond the life history to the perspective of the participant  
testimonios are an educating of the researcher and reader  
testimonios are the means by which the participant is empowered and change occurs;  
testimonios decree awareness of self in the environment and voice to express that awareness  
testimonios expect the participants to change the environment  
testimonios are an academic text framed within scholarly literature and with a critical analysis

I am on a new path,  
academic and Indigenous  
I must therefore know  
I am Don Miguel Ruiz and my questions take me to a new plane of existence  
I therefore ask,  
What are the sources that shape my views on social justice and educational equity?  
What are the sources that shape my identity?  
What attributes of my identity do I use to shape my educational persona?

I ask and I answer

Bias - western ideological conceptualization of relational activities deemed harmful  
my paradigmatic perspective - beneficial

I dance with my subjectivity rather than to skulk in the darkness of a veil of objectivity.

Epoché? I cannot deny my existence, deny my mind, deny... I?

Testimonio? I am the privileged component, I am the life experience

I am the word and the knowledge and I am the value

Excludes rigor as dialogue?

why believe what is presented?

reality, goodness, likelihood, sufficiency, trustworthiness, believability, and credibility  
VALIDITY!!!!

verity in regard to reality

VIALE INFERENCES FROM THE DATA !!!! GENERALIZATIONS DUE TO  
EXPERIMENTATION!!!!

These are fundamentals of a different era and means of knowing

So then trustworthiness?

I am theory, I am story, am I not trustworthy? Is my experience not reality?

I am truth, I am the way, I am the message

and I am the storyteller

I am guided and a guide

I am encouraged by the dialogue and the need to understand

Together you and I seek understanding of this

Together you and I corroborate this story

Together you and I trust in the process

Together you and I determine la verdad

Marc, they ask, how can you say this is research?

I tell you seeking justice is

academic integrity.

¿De verdad?

¡Por supuesto!

when we put people first in our minds and actions

La Justicia sí existe

It is a political movement!

Triangulation

Three views to see the same concept

We therefore all agree?

Crystallization

Multiple views to see the same concept clearer

More of us agree?

Like the molcajete, we break our contents to create a new product

The process brings together product in a new fashion, better and more complete - holistic

Together we reject the trinity Instead we will venerate in the light  
of the stained glass mosaic, como las guadalupanas.  
Juntos, construyendo un mosaico much brighter que la Cueva de los Cristales,  
Our mosaic springs from our axiology y juntos... we recognize our narrative as truth when  
Our pláticas testimonios, y cuentos are political and illuminate hegemony,  
When we value varied ways of knowing and both story and academic prose  
reflexión in a pocho/mojado/Chicano way of knowing  
truth and respect are one and the same, relationships are primary,

we do not exclude others from a similar dialogue that is just as valuable.  
to the problems of our people, we pay attention  
so that as we study we improve our community  
en el Teatro de la Reforma,  
our story is presented to the world as we challenge what we think we know about our  
relationships with each other. Then, usando corridos, novelas, y cuentos we retell our story in el  
teatro campesino, en las escuelas, y también en la casa.  
We change the world we see and how we are seen

We don't limit ourselves  
to the construct of validity  
We enrich ourselves  
through the concept of truth  
I reject conformity through this tool... the  
Purpose of the standard we create exists  
Only in the context of our dialogue as  
We shape the narrative

Our value, my value... I am of value  
Because we understand each  
other,  
a Truth  
exists, and I pursue it righteously  
I, product, do not intend to be transferred to other forms of I or you. We though  
Are each invited to consider how I and you  
Exist as one separate and one together

### [III]

I am the colonizer,  
I am the minoritized and the prominent  
I am the colonized  
I am Lisa, Ernesto, Sergio, Olivia, Gonzalo, and Adriana

I am Michelle, Jose, and Dagoberto  
I am Don Quixote de la Mancha, Joaquín, y Pancho  
I am Jacinto Treviño, Juan de Oñate, and Jose de Escandón  
Soy Benito, y también el padrecito Hidalgo

me dijeron a mí, levántate ...  
Soy Lázaro, risen from the death  
To new life... an academic  
Performing duties for which my savior has in store for me  
For the sake of being  
... A protestor, yes  
To the streets and passages with marks of engagement  
But just as importantly being the bridges and pathways with my heart and mind and words

at this moment taking new and old and ...  
soy Chicano  
en mi sangre y con cada aliento de aire que respiro  
I know the masa of the north winds and the nixtamal and sulfur of the south  
Beguiled by the orange blossoms of the west and sooted with the sugar cane ash from the east  
I am in simpler terms,  
*con o sin safos,*  
The rascuache academic

### **I am Chicano!**

We belong here in the academy; we belong in this microcosm of society just as in any other. In remembrance of Corky, de la lucha, del movimiento, this is my revolutionary cry, mi grito, to call upon my peers to join me in the quest to reclaim the spaces that are our lineage and systems of learning, to be Indigenous Chicanos of one community (De La Torre & Zúñiga, 2013). A new revolutionary rallying cry por nuestra raza, por nuestra gente to the academy (De La Torre & Zúñiga, 2013; García, 2010; Gunckel, 2016). I share with you this poem as my adobe brick on the road to Atzlán, experiencing El Plan Espiritual, clarifying an epistemological discourse and my pedagogical and political frame of reference as faculty (Calvo-Quirós, 2016). As the rascuache academic I leave you with this: ¡Soy teoría – Soy la palabra – Soy Chicano!

This poem was previously published as part of E. Fidel Ramirez's dissertation, *Existing con el Lobo, Traversing la Frontera con Mis Nepantla Coyotes, y Buscando la Vida del Zorro: An Autoethnographic Exploration of a Chicano in Academia* in 2017.

## REFERENCES

- Bishop, R. (2011). *Freeing Ourselves*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Brayboy, B. M. J. (2005) Toward a tribal Critical Race Theory in education. *The Urban Review*, 37(5), 425 – 446. doi:10.1007/s11256-005-0018-y
- Calderón, D., Delgado Bernal, D., Pérez Huber, L, Malagón, M. C., & Vélez, V. N. (2012). A Chicana feminist epistemology revisited: Cultivating ideas a generation later. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(4), 513 – 539.
- Calvo-Quirós, W. A. (2016). The Emancipatory Power of the Imaginary: Defining Chican@ Speculative Productions. *Aztlán: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 41(1), 155-170.
- Cooper, G. H. (1987). Coyote in Navajo reigion and cosmology. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 7(2), 181 – 193.
- De La Torre, R., & Zúñiga, C. G. (2013). Chicano spirituality in the construction of an imagined nation: Aztlán. *Social Compass*, 60(2), 218-235. DOI: 10.1177/0037768613481706
- García, O. (2010). Bilingualism in education in the multilingual Apple: The future of the past. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 1, Article 5. Retrieved from <http://fordham.bepress.com/jmer/vol1/iss1/5>
- Guajardo, M. A. & Guajardo, F. J. (2015). *La Universidad de la Vida: A pedagogy built to last*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Gunckel, C. (2016). Building a movement and constructing community: Photography, the united farm workers, and el malcriado. *Social Justice*, 42(3), 29-45.
- Jago, B. J. (1996). Postcards, ghosts, and fathers: Revising family stories. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 2, 495. doi: 10.1177/107780049600200406
- Kaomea, J. (2009). Indigenous education for all? A metaphorical counterstory. *International Critical Childhood Policy Studies*, 2(1), 109 – 121.
- Kitchen, J., Cherubini, L., Trudeau, L., & Hodson, J. (2010). Weeding out or developing capacity? Challenges for Aboriginal teacher education. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 56(2), 107 – 123.
- Ortiz, A. (1983). *Handbook of North American Indians, vol. 10: Southwest*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution.
- Rivera, T. (1992) ...y no se lo tragó la tierra/ ...and the Earth did not devour him. Houston: Arte Publico Press.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (2nd ed.). New York: Zed Books.
- Torres, E., Guajardo, M. A., Guajardo, F. & Ramirez, D. (2015). *Liberating the case study: Critical analysis of self as educational and leadership development*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Willis, D. B., & Murphy-Shigematsu, S. (2009). *Transcultural Japan: At the Borderlands of Race, Gender, & Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is ceremony: Indigenous research methods*. Black Point, Canada: Fernwood Publishing.