I Throw Punches for My Race, 
but I Don’t Want to Be a Man: 
Writing Us—Chica-nos (Girl, Us)/ 
Chicanas—into the Movement Script

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I. From You: The Manifest Chicano to us: 
La Nueva/The New Chicana

Spring 1972, an unspecified university, Aztlán EEUU, U.S.A. A Chicano critic prepares to labor, desk replete with now widely recognizable instruments of literary production: “I am Joaquin” (1967), Pacho (1959), With His Pistol in His Hand (1958), Barrio Boy (1971), The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo (1972), ...And the Earth Did Not Part (1971), The Chicano Manifesto (1971). Walls are lined, on the one side with brave Aztec Chicano warriors who scout the cultural horizon accompanied by shapely Aztec Chicana princesses sporting the national denomination, Aztlán, on their reproductive organs, and on the other side, with revolutionary posters imaging Che’s angry admonition: You are not a minority! In the background, inspirational music, that much loved movement song, resounds:

I am a Chicano, brownskinned, an American but with honor. When they tell me that the revolution has started, I will defend my people with all my courage.

I have my pride and manliness, my culture and love, I have my faith, I’m different, my skin is brown. I have a culture, I have a heart. And no one can take them from me, no not any bastard.

For those Chicanos involved in this historic endeavor, denied to their parents for generations, criticism is both a liberating and a troubling act. As a paid profession, it offers an escape from a legacy of work in the fields, the canneries, the railroads, and the service sector. As a creative act, it enables us to explore forgotten community narratives, unwritten literary dialogues, and censured indigenous presences. Yet for all its material and ideological benefits, practicing criticism in the alternative ethnic sector has its drawbacks. Publicly sanctioned histories of culture fail to legitimize the object of one’s labor: Chicano literature. And institutions of criticism are not forthcoming in welcoming unconventional bicultural critics who converse in various traditions and idioms, subjecting the sanctity of critical language to the unsaintly rhythms of the Chicano vernacular.

Yes, within the halls of the Academy, the position of the Chicano critic is still precarious. Nevertheless this precariousness is dissolved at the symbolic, imaginary level
by a nationalist aesthetic which offers the marginalized Chicano critic an escape from subjuction to another ethnicity, even if this escape often falls short of its intended function. The appeal of this aesthetic is captured by one of the popular anthologies of the period, *El Espejo* (1969), which marked out a new Chicano literary sensibility with the proposal "that they were those who needed no other reflection other than themselves, thus *The Mirror*." Four decades of critical life and a plethora of Chicana voices, which draw inspiration in the construction of yet another politics of representation, have instructed us as well to the identity of those who have only required their own reflection in order to know themselves and are privileged enough to encounter that image in a seemingly unmediated, transparent fashion.

Who is this subject so empowered with literary capital as to know itself, not once, but many times, doubling incessantly within the tasty banquet of alternative literary production? Pivotal texts which map out significant passages toward culturalist and universalist discourses in Chicano criticism foreground the answer. At the heart of nationalism's preferred revolutionary narrative, *With His Pistol* (Paredes, 1982 [1958]), looms the commanding hero of the ballad of border conflict, Gregorio Cortez, "pistol in hand" and defiantly proclaiming his right to aggressive self-defense in the face of Anglo encroachment.

And, at the heart of Bruce-Novoa's (1975, pp. 22–42) "The Space of Chicano Literature," which references cultural domination from the lens of abstract idealism, lies the generic, twentieth-century anti-hero, *Occidental Man*—a Man whose existential problematic of literary salvation becomes a Chicano writer's dilemma at the hand of Juan Bruce-Novoa's philosophical mestizaje. Criticism's partner in dialogue faithfully delivers this cultural subject through a myriad of male literary identities: el pachucho, el vato loco, el cholo, the Aztec, the militant Chicano, the existential Chicano, the political Chicano, the precocious Chicano, the Jungian Chicano-o-o-o, and mostly authoritarian fathers.

![Table](AttorneyWithJacket.png)

Antonio Adan Juan
Joaquin Miguel Louie

Literary subjects such as these mark an alternative national cultural border, dividing Chicanos/Chicanas in the company of Mexican brothers to the South: Villa, Zapata, Paz, selectively recruited into the pantheon of La Raza by authoritative discourse for their crusades against domination under the unifying impulse of Aztlan—the imaginary geography claimed as the true site of Chicano subjectivity. The cultural border encircling Chicano subjects is, in turn, etched by productions that visualize new racial subjects inspired by José Vasconcelos, a Mexican scholar/politician/essayist from whose philosophical spirit and imaginary cosmic body the *entire* Mexican Race was said to speak. In this vein, José Medina's "The Chicano has emerged from Indo-Hispanic Roots" (1970, p. 217) inscribes the three-headed mestizo as the essential subject for Chicano identity, figuring him as a combined genealogy of Spanish conquistadores and Aztec Warriors without a trace of a Chicana/Mexicana authenticating root.

Textually within the very same Chicano vernacular which challenged the Euro-centricism of English and Spanish by crossing their borders in illegal codes that would elicit charges of "illiteracy," Chicano identity is written with linguistic qualifiers—*o/ós*—which subsume the Chicana into a universal ethnic subject that speaks with the masculine instead of the feminine and embodies itself in a Chicano male. Except, of course, in those cases where the embodied Chicana is overwritten with "Chicanas"—a collective denomination referencing an other subject. A case in point is the now familiar *We are Chicanos* (Ortego, 1973), which opens the gate to Mexican American Literature...
with the image of a young Chicana representing the passage to modern Chicano expression.

_The Chicano Manifesto_ (Rendón, 1972), acclaimed by politicians of reputable stature for its insights into the militancy and origins of the Chicano Movement, furnishes ideological support for this transcription of the Chicana/a subject. While contesting racism, economic exploitation, and political domination, the author, Armando Rendón, reinforces dominant ideology by identifying “machismo” as the symbolic principle of the Chicano revolt and adopting machismo as the guideline for Chicano family life. Thus, nationalism’s preferred male subject is imbued with a masculine, patriarchal ideology that resists the apologetic sympathies ascribed to it by Chicano cultural practitioners seeking to erase male domination from the semantic orbit of machismo.3

For those inclined to minimize the specific gender connotations of this imaginary postcolonial(?) representation, Rendón clarifies that his tendency to view the Chicano revolt as a male-dominated phenomenon can be attributed to his gender status: his being “macho.” Thus he grounds his symbolic treatment of machismo in a specific male body: his, equating macho with Chicoano, a term generalized to embrace the nationalist objective: nationhood. Rendón elaborates: “macho in other words can no longer merely relate to manhood but to nationhood as well” (1972, p. 105).

With this gender objectification, the silenced Other, Chicanas/hembras, are thus removed from full-scale participation in the Chicano movement as fully embodied, fully empowered U.S. Mexican female subjects. They are not only engendered under machismo but their gender is disfigured at the symbolic level under malinchismo, an ideological construct signifying betrayal which draws inspiration from the generic Malinche.4 (According to official Mexican histories, she is the Mexican Eve who delivered her people to Cortez.) Thus, within the subtext of Rendón’s essay, the forces of revolutionary contention are drawn around the equation of male power with machismo and female betrayal with malinchismo. The former, _Chicano_ power, represents revolutionary fervor, while the latter, female power, malinchismo, represents betrayal and conquest.

Like la llorona (the female weeping woman), who was condemned to limbo as punishment for breaking with socially prescribed female norms, these engendered Chicanas are confined to a state of permanent exile and distanced from the political struggle that they waged daily alongside heroines of the likes of Dolores Huerta. But these Chicanas are not only displaced, they are disowned, arbitrarily cast over to the other side, lumped together with the likes of Miss Jimenez, a character who is significantly the daughter of Jim not Juan and the most ridiculed antagonist in Luis Valdez’s drama of Chicanas/o assimilation: “Los Vendidos/The Sell-Outs” (El Teatro Campesino, 1967, pp. 35–49).5 Within this logic, if Chicanas wished to receive the authorizing signature of predominant movement discourses and figure within the record of Mexican practices of resistance in the U.S., then they had to embody themselves as males, adopt traditional family relations, and dwell only on their racial and/or ethnic oppression.

Yet even this type of definition, which implies affirming oneself through the symbolic construction of another, was deceptive, since Chicano nationalism was also predicated on the necessity of mimesis: a one-to-one correspondence between the subject and its reflection in a mirror-like duplication. Without the possibility of uninterrupted self-duplication, without the possibility of inscribing viable Mexicana/Chicana female subjects with which to identify at the center of Chicana/o practices of resistance, Chicanas were denied cultural authenticity and independent self-affirmation. And both these elements were central to a movement dedicated to altering the negative figurations of Chicanas/os at the hands of others who had for centuries blocked any possibility of legitimate self-representation to Americanas/os of Mexican descent.
In retrospect, it can be said that at some level Rendón's gendered account of the Chicano revolt represents an extreme variant of Movement thinking—extreme in honesty and in its Manichean treatment of social relations. Nevertheless, like many other Raza manifestos of the period The Chicano Manifesto only served to reinforce the saliency of the Chicano male subject within authoritative Chicano/a cultural production. Ironically, this cultural production came into representation by foregrounding "difference" and the right of all Mexicans (here brown people) to battle aggressively for cultural proprietorship and definition as fully empowered ethnic beings against the nullifying desire of any "bastard." It was precisely nationalism's failure to inscribe gender differences and the struggle of Chicanas at the center of political resistance, that rendered the now famous national anthem, "Yo soy Chicano," problematic.

For if this affirmation of ethnic subjectivity constituted an impassioned moment of truthful self-revelation in which for the first time we admitted publicly that, indeed, we were Brown and not beige or off-white and Chicanos—against the imperatives not only of the dominant regimes of representation but also of the instruction of our parents—this affirmation of Chicano identity also signified a betrayal and deception. This was the case because the "us" of cultural nationalist discourse was more often than not a "he" and not a s/he. Thus the necessity of altering the collective subject of Chicano movement discourse, of giving it a Chicana female presence. It was precisely this necessity that inspired a young generation of Chicanas who, protesting their figuration as Chicano males, retorted: "I don't want to be a man."

Ironically, the discourse of exclusion and betrayal, which assisted in displacing Chicanas such as these from the nationalist script of Chicano identity, flourished in a period when Chicanas were questioning their traditional roles, increasing their participation within the political arena, and inscribing a budding Chicana feminist discourse and practice. As Anna Nieto-Gómez (1976, p. 9) pointed out, the discourse of betrayal flourished among Chicano nationalists and their natural allies: Chicana "loyalists," both of whom aimed at containing the woman question within the Cause by availing themselves of a number of male-centered Chicano ideologies.

It is not surprising that the targets of the discourse of exclusion were precisely those Chicana activists/feminists who met themselves and others on the other side of the page, shunned traditional roles and/or actively pursued Chicana-centered practices of resistance. These were the Chicanas who replaced the discourses of compadres and carnalismo with the discourses of comadres (sisters) and feminismo (feminists), macho with hembra, and fiercely combated male domination in the leadership of the Chicano Movement and the political life of the community. These were the Chicanas who were often targeted as the objects of the newly revised malinche narrative, authored under the prerequisites of a dogmatic nationalism which was irreverent toward the shaping influences of the heterogeneous experiences of conquest and regionalism on Chicanas/os.

These were the Chicanas who would go on to rename the much misunderstood Malinche, Malintzin, figuring her as a precursor to Chicana nationalism and feminism, and opening up another alternative space of cultural production: ChicanA studies. Like Rendón's imaginary malinches, who were made to personify betrayal, these Chicanas were routinely told that they were dividing and weakening the Chicano Movement. It was not uncommon that they were labeled "vendedoras" and reminded of a purported complicity with White hegemonic frameworks which sought to dominate, not liberate the Cause.

To echo a young Chicana activist/feminist for whom being a woman and being a ChicanA were equally important, no one likes being called a traitor in a movement
one would die for. Particularly not the newly constructed, newly vindicated Women of the Race—those Women who broke their shackles and stabbed the spirit of injustice when confronted in the fields by a shotgun, when bloodied on the streets of Whittier Boulevard, or when constructed under the violent disfigurement of Anglo/a chauvinism or Chicano machismo. Those Women of the Race contested Bakke, Farah, and the War in Vietnam, protesting with pickets in hands under the ethnic denomination Chicano. And this was a self-denomination which they assumed as Villanueva (1970 p. 189) had intended it: “as a challenge for those who stereotype and as an act of defiance,” not submission to another. “Other” here means the Chicano male, a figure also reified within the ideological equation Chicano=machismo.

Margarita Virgina Sánchez, a thirteen-year-old from California, outlined this passionate spirit of Chicano consciousness in her poetic narrative of ethnic identity (“Escape”) which moves its speaking subject from the complacency of meltingpotism to militant, ethnic self-awareness and separatism. Rather than constituting Chicano identity as an immutably given, a once and for all to be recovered arbitrarily through mutually exclusive gender categories, Sánchez constructs it as a shifting positionality, variously enlisting competing interests and alliances throughout time and space. And she emphasizes the process leading up to Chicano identity rather than its product, versing:

Last week,
I had been white
... we were friends
Yesterday
I was Spanish
... we talked ...
once in a while.

The poet follows with the affirmation: “Today, I am Chicano... and you do not know me,” thereby addressing the other ethnic exclusion to which Chicanas were subjected within dominant society when they assumed their identities as self-directed agents of change. And the poem ends with the promise of contestation—separatism and political struggle:

Tomorrow,
I rise to fight
... and we are enemies. (Sánchez, 1973, p. 208)

Viewed from the exclusive boundaries of the manifest Chicano, this affirmation, which offers a limited social analysis based on racial oppositions, is transgressive because it reappropriates for its female speaking subject the basic principles of nationalist discourse and places her at the frontline of ethnic contestation. While this poem successfully “escapes” the ethnic subjection of Chicanas within discourse, it does not, however, foreground gender within its contestation. This oppositional spirit of the Women of the Race would be figured through “a” of ChicanA cultural practices and ChicanA feminist discourse.

Viola Correa exemplifies this oppositional spirit with “La Nueva Chicana,” which introduces a new subject for political identity by taking us from the Manifest Chicano to the New ChicanA. Significantly, this nueva Chicana is figured by multiple female subjects who are linked together by a common history of work and protest. Yet these female subjects are located with different roles that confirm their allegiance to the movement and they are spoken in multiple expressions of gender that simultaneously reference family relations and political commitments. This practice of representation
celebrates the comradery between Chicanas/os and creates an intimate bond between
these women and their public. This bond, in turn, disclaims the negative figurations of
Chicanas within discourse, encouraging others to hear what they have to say. To those
who might be inclined to dismiss these Chicanas and their significant role in the move-
ment for social reform, Correa’s message is look around, look at our women. Thus, the
poem “calls” its spectator, you, to attention:

¡Hey!
See that lady protesting against injustice,
es mi mamá [she’s my mother]
That girl in the brown beret,
   The one teaching the children
   she’s my hermana [sister]
Over there fasting with the migrants
   es mi tía [she’s my aunt]

The lady with the forgiving eyes

listen to her shout. (Correa, 1970)

This Chicana identity is itself the site of multiple contestations, for not only does
la nueva Chicana contest ignorance, but she, herself, is the object of another contestation:
the establishment condemns her in the poem as a “militant Chicana,” the newspapers
name her a “dangerous subversive,” and the FBI, classifies her as “a big problem.” Once
having convinced her readers of the valuable role of this new Chicana within the move-
ment, Correa celebrates this new subject of political identity, overriding these external
constructions with another one: ours. She states: “In Aztlan, we call her la Nueva
Chicana.” Thus, the new Chicana at last receives the authorizing signature of her peers.
And she enters movement discourse with her own name, a name which constructs her
both as a Chican-a and a woman and subverts the twin myths of malinchismo and
assimilation.

II: Writing Another Story/Manifest-ación—Hers:
Yo Soy ChicanA or Answering Joaquín and José

Writing “us” Chicanas into the movement script took more than just referencing a
largely essential Chicana subject into the narrative of Chicana/o liberation. As Margarita
Cota-Cárdenas pointed out, the Chicana had to give herself her own value and definition,
avoiding the trendy overtures of the men and mainstream feminists, both of whom only
promised to deliver a life in the service of others. For Chicanas to alter this course, we
had to construct another political category: Chicanas, marking a female presence within
the ethnic discourse of Chicanos in the playful fashion of Chica-nos (Girl, Us), Chicana/
as, Chicana/o, and Chican/o/a. We had to write another story: a mujer story, another
discourse from the perspective of the foregrounded Chicana.

As Cota-Cárdenas suggested, writing “us” into the movement script meant more
than substituting an A for an O at the end of Chican. We Chicanas had to create our
own word, our own cosmos, constructed by “Chicana”—here, sister, woman. While
Cota-Cárdenas’s (1980) formula for writing Chicana liberation inscribes a universal
female subject which suffers from many of the limitations of essentialism, her “Late
Declaration/Manifesto” (pp. 37–38) signals an important passageway toward a new
subjectivity and aesthetics, located in Chicana women's experiences and expressive forms. "Manifestación" thus facilitates the inscription of a belated alternative mujer-centered discourse of Chicana expression, opening the way for the jump to nationalist feminism and Chicana socialist feminism. "Manifestación" also textualizes Chicana militancy—already in full swing—with the title "manifestación," signifying in Español not only "declaration" or "new phenomenon," but "protest" as well.

Finally Cota-Cárdenas rewrites the nationalist discourse that equated female practices of resistance with betrayal of the Race. Rather than alienate the Chicana from "La Causa," she suggests that by speaking her female names: Chicana, Sister Woman, and imagining a universe which constructs her experiences and rallies on her behalf, the Chicana will be a "homage to her race." In proposing that the Chicana's self-affirmation will be of collective benefit, Cota-Cárdenas enacts a strategy of reversal typical of early Chicana movement writings that generalized the interest of the Chicana to the entire group and isolated "machismo" as antithetical to the Cause.

With this practice, Cota-Cárdenas implies that for Chicana liberation to be written, Chicanas had to avail themselves not only of different semantic markers, from which to imagine new subjectivities and intersected social relations, but also of new forms and strategies of representation. In the seventies, these alternative forms of representation would surface largely from the pens of young Chicana cultural practitioners who inscribed their own independent ethnic identities within poetic narratives. Raquel Rodríguez and Sara Estrella were among these Chicanas who responded to the male-centered texts in such terms as these:

Yo soy mujer [I am a woman]
I don't want to be a man
El hombre, the man is my brother

but always a man
Yo soy una mujer [I am a woman]
I wish to be one
... I no longer like being none.
("Yo soy mujer," Rodríguez, 1978, p. 18)

Yo soy india. [I am an Indian woman]
Yo soy morena. [I am a brown woman]
Yo soy la mestiza. [I am a mixed blooded woman]
Yo soy la Chicana de Aztlán. [I am a Chicana from Aztlán.]
(Untitled, Sara Estrella, c. 1972, p. 10)

These declarations represent a step toward Chicana representation within new expressive forms. They alter Chicano movement discourse with their absented presences and modify nationalism's existential formula. "Yo soy"/"I am" with a female subject: a Chicana mujer. Yet these narratives tell a different, though related, story of la mujer. Rodríguez replaces the male subject of Chicano identity with a female subject, emphasizing not her ethnicity but silenced gender and repressed desire to be figured as someone: a mujer/woman.

In contrast, Estrella's "Yo soy la Chicana de Aztlán" inscribes a Chicana as the subject of an alternative narrative of ethnic ancestry. This narrative writes mestizaje—that prized nationalist ideal and symbol of ethnicity—with the multiple evocations of a female speaking subject who affirms various racial identities to configure the Chicana from Aztlán. Thus the poet gives the Chicana the color and mixed parentage formerly
restricted to the preferred Chicano male subject. But this poem also establishes a distance from universal feminism, for the speaker goes on to elaborate that she is not just any woman—not a generic woman”—but a woman “of the” movement. Thus, Estrella outlines the path taken by many early Chicana feminists and together with Rodríguez opens the way towards other types of Chicana identity narratives that speak Chicana subjectivity within more complex figurations. These unknowingly carry the mark of Noemi Lorenzo (1974, p. 39), a sister who anticipated many of us by stating: “There is no one Chicana, but different women who call themselves Chicanas.”

Writing this plural “Us”—the multiplicity of Chicana subjectivity—is an endeavor which currently occupies the attention of many writers and critics who seek to establish a distance between the old politics of cultural representation, based on similarity, and the new politics, based on difference as described by Stuart Hall. In the seventies, the so-called essential Chicana subject was a common figure on the Chicana cultural horizon, featuring herself with the Aztec woman, the three-headed Mestiza, the Adelita, and the earth Mother. Yet, even within this early period, the essential singularity commonly attributed to Chicana nationalist discourse was already subject to question. First of all, this Mujer spoke in multiple idioms that short-circuited a one-to-one correspondence between herself and her representation. This subversion was flaunted by Chicanas in phrases like “bilingual says twice as much.” And second, already in the essential Chicana subject, there was a multiplicity of us’s which threatened to cross the borders of the singular A of ChicanA.

Such was the case, for example with Martha Cotera’s (1978, pp. 5–9) “La Loca de La Raza Cósmica” / “The Crazy Woman/Queen of La Raza Cósmica,” which greets its readers throughout different stanzas with Chicana subjects such as these:

Soy la Mujer Chicana [I am the Chicana Woman]
Soy mujer [I am a woman]

...............................
Soy la India María [I am the Indian, María]

...............................
Soy la revolucionaria [I am the revolutionary]

...............................
Soy la que hecha chingazos por su Raza [I am the one who throws punches for her Race] (1978, p. 5)

Following the essentialist critique, it can be said that “Crazy Queen of the Cosmic Race” seeks to inscribe an all-knowing, ever-present universal Chicana subject for ethnic identity: one Mujer/Queen, without concern for difference or contradiction between mujeres who disagree or compete from different positions. And, certainly, “Crazy Queen” does not engage those Chicana materialists who would contest the idealism which introduces the poem. Yet within this poem the tensions between the singular and the collective do surface. It is, after all, dedicated to the Chicana women and Crazy Queens of the Race. “Crazy Queen” offers multiple innovations and strategies that speak to its creation of an alternative identity narrative which both contests and foregrounds significant differences. And these “differences” are not necessarily available to the reader at first sight—they surface once the poem is examined within its context.

Cotera achieves this shift in Chicana identity, from similarity to difference, by altering the formula popularized within the most famous nationalist identity narrative, “I am Joaquin” (Rodolfo González, 1967). Whereas “I am Joaquin” constructed an essential identity for cultural affirmation through an epic which moved through five and a half centuries of Mexican and Chicano history and linked the common Chicano hero
to legendary Mexican and Chicano male figures, this Chicana-centered text roots itself in the present and the contrary experiences of a variety of Chicana prototypes. These subjects of Chicana identity are not the heroines of an uncharted binational counterstory. Unlike Phyllis López's poem "La Chicana" (1978)—which honors those Chicana/Mexicana heroines neglected by González (a neglect underlined by the photograph of a male child/adult protagonist that opens the text of "I am Joaquin")—these Chicanas inhabit the script of everyday life. They include the one who heats up the TV dinner, the homemaker, the streetwalker, the political prisoner, the community organizer, the Avon Lady, the factory worker, the Brown Beret, the drop-out, and the college graduate. In the fashion of the seventies this multiplicity is brought together under the unifying voice of the poetic subject, yet her imaginary female/mestiza body spans interpersonal and geographic spaces versing in a twin bilingual and bicultural discourse that says "twice as much."

From another perspective "Crazy Queen" offers more than just another invitation for Chicanas to rewrite the Cause/La Causa by incorporating difference, here gender, into the prevailing discourses of oppression and resistance. "Crazy Queen" offers a complex elaboration of Chicana identity, drawing from the familiar categories of national origin, beliefs, political affiliation, and economic status, all of which make possible the entry of Chicanas into representation. Yet "Crazy Queen" subverts limits of nationalist discourse by substituting the male nato lobo for a "crazy woman," a Chicana prototype of the sixties who intruded into previously restricted spaces within politics, the academy, and sexuality. If this were not enough, "Crazy Queen" parodies classical identity narratives such as those which modified "La Raza Cósmica," originally written by José Vasconcelos.

Thus "Crazy Queen" begins playfully rather than with the somber existential attitude of Chicano identity narratives. It trades the historical, social, and ethnic movements of binational history for a local female journey through civil states, political movements, linguistic dialects, sexual politics, cultural practices, and urban locales. "Crazy Queen" trades the singularity of passive and idealized women for Chicanas who are defined by their disparate practices of everyday life and who are engendered with multiple names: mujer, señorita, ms. These Queens maintain different political affiliations. They "throw punches for la Raza," screaming "Chicano power" or they assimilate by anglicization. They embody different types of labor: work in the cannery, the Silicone Valley, the fields, and the service sector. And they transform English with their Spanish accents: often saying "tack you" instead of thank you; "chooz" instead of "shoes."

Unlike the calendar Aztec princess, who hung like ornaments on the laps of their mates in an untouched paradisiacal landscape, these Chicana "Queens" are not foreign to the downside of contemporary life: the unemployment office, prison, and drug rehabilitation centers. Rather than personifying singular aspects of traditional Mexican high culture in the example of "Joaquin," they are linked to a barrage of mixed popular cultural practices, including Guadalupe, holy-rollers, lowriding, styling, and sarape sandals; Mariachis, Salsa, Freddy Fender, Vicki Carr; spray painting, True Confessions, and revolutionary literature.

These Chicanas also embody multiple ethnic denominations. Unlike Joaquin, their ethnicity is written in the feminine and incorporates political identities not listed by such Census bureau designations as American of Spanish surname—here, "a.s.s.,” and "coconut." And while "Crazy Queen" rejects assimilation, the poem ends by paying tribute to raza women, crediting them for their perseverance, creativity, and struggle in the face of racism, machismo, economic exploitation, and the combined pressures of everyday life. Finally, the poem celebrates the practice of affirming Chicana women in
counter-discourses which recognize the Chicana for “achieving a higher status in the
cause of Chicana women and men equally, both together, as well as apart” (Cotera,
1978 p. 8).

Unlike most Chicano movement productions, which often generalized from the
speaker’s condition to the interests of the group without recognizing the partiality of
the representation, the poet acknowledges the limitations of her own female narrative
by prefacing her poem with the disclaimer: “If you don’t see yourself here, sister, I can
only tell you I’m sorry.” Thus she mimics a good number of Chicana-centered texts of
the period which solicited feedback from a mixed public, favoring open-ended produc-
tions, or addressing the possibility of multiple subjects in their figurations of Chicanas/
chos and/or feminism(s).

Another—more classical—type of Chicana/her/story, “La Chicana” by Phyllis López
(1978), registers its pluralities and contains its multiplicities within a nationalist
discourse. In this poem López enlists some of the conventions of the Chicano cultural
identity narrative, including the story of race and class oppression. This is presented
from the perspective of a Chicana prototype who, embodying all aspects of her heritage
and imaginative ancestral geography, achieves the monumental stature reserved for Chi-
cano males. What is most significant, perhaps, is that while the speaker entitles her
poem “La Chicana,” speaking the silence of Chicano cultural nationalism, she also
alternates between a male and female identity, invoking Chicanas/os under a new iden-
tity: La Chicana.

The identity of this speaking subject and her entitlement within Chicano move-
ment discourse is disclosed at the beginning of the poem with the words “La Chicana,”
and at the end with the familiar self-affirmation “I am a Chicana/Yo soy una Chicana.”
This belated assertion of Chicana identity at once underscores her omission from classical
movement narratives at the same time that it identifies the common interests that link
Chicano men and women.

Like Cotera, López avoids the grand narratives of his/her-stories which recount
singular historic deeds of remarkable individuals. She reenacts a collective struggle of
group survival, constructing her identity with a barrage of affirmations that variously
link her to the “weary campesina” (female farm worker) who “stoops,” “sweats,” and
“toils,” and to the farm worker who has been denied the right to live like other human
beings. Her identification with the socially dispossessed links her to key movement texts
like “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán/The Spiritual Manifesto of Aztlán” which specifies
that “Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops”
(Denver Conference, March 1969). Thus, “La Chicana” progressively outlines the mul-
tiple burdens which Chicanas/os encounter by interlacing the accumulated negative
impact of racism and classism with her identity.

This dual burden introduces the poem which commences with the testimony of
the speaking subject who admits that “she has fought and survived the pains of racial
hatred” but has yet to free herself of the “bondage of poverty.” Her identification with
the farm worker in turn affirms this burden, for in the states of California and Texas,
this figure is synonymous with national minority identity and lower social class, and
again with indio and the mestizo. The link between race, class, and gender is thus made
available through the embodied female speaking subject who establishes herself at the
center of the struggle for survival and resistance through the liberating power of her
newly found discourse.

“La Chicana” also celebrates difference by its final affirmation of “una mujer
valiente,” extending to the Chicana access to the traditional values associated with
bravery, strength, and effectiveness. The poem recalls the cultural axiom “hacerse valer”
(to make oneself worthy) but breaks the link between valentía and hombria (bravery and manhood) through the use of the generic “mujer valiente”—a brave woman. La Chicana thus references a new subject for political identity: a forceful, long-suffering, and effective source of strength and resistance.

“Look at Our Women: The Strength Upon Which Our Culture Builds,” Dolores Huerta. UFW

From other artistic quarters la mujer valiente was widely featured in alternative artistic representations referencing political identity. By far the most forceful representation of this figure was the militant Chicana who embodied a number of struggles, including the famous Farah Strike, the Farm Worker’s Boycott, and the struggle against male domination voiced under “Abajo Con Los Machos!” (Down with the machos!). Within art this was the Chicana who raised her clenched fist in defiance, opened her mouth wide in protest, and revealed in her long black hair which boldly defied the Señorita bun or the Twiggy Look. More so than any other female image, this Chicana referenced liberation, and for this reason, she was commonly represented as towering or remaking Lady Liberty. Often the militant Chicana embraced the cause of the Women of the Brown Beret or the Mujeres who visualized their escape from the prison of poverty, racism, and unsympathetic husbands with extensive triptyches featuring their multiple passages to liberation.

Nowhere was this mujer valiente more forcefully captured than in the series of portraits built on images of the Chicana Guadalupe, all of them radical revisions of the brown Virgin, patroness of México. A traditional portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe (Fig. 1) shows the iconography that is adapted and transformed in the later paintings, from Ester Hernández’s “The Virgin of Guadalupe Defending the Rights of Chicanas” (1975, fig. 2) to three paintings (fig. 3–5) by Yolanda López: “Margaret Stewart: Our Lady of Guadalupe” (1978), “Victoria F. Franco: Our Lady of Guadalupe” (1978), and “Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe” (1978). In the portrait by Hernández, which frequently carries the name “The Militant Guadalupe,” a Chicana breaks out of tradition with a karate kick, shedding the oppressive cloak and motionless stance of the Catholic Virgin whose hands and legs are bound by the dictates of religious rituals. In her portrait of the abuela seamstress, Yolanda López shows a grandmother, dressed in street clothes and centered within the frame of the Guadalupe sun. From this centered position, she gains recognition for her work and calls upon the spectator to look at her, the new heroine producer of the race. The transformation of Guadalupe into “Our Lady of Guadalupe” is complete with López’s portrait of her grandmother, Victoria F. Franco, whose dignity, strength, and endurance are captured in a full length reproduction of an abuela, proudly sitting on top of the Guadalupe cloak. Unlike the singular Chicana, these subjects represent at least two Chicana identities simultaneously: the old and the new, us and them.

Within these Guadalupe texts the nationalist and feminist discourses of Chicana liberation are cross-referenced in the cultural metaphors of the artist as producer, a theme of another portrait by López in which the painter herself, running from the Guadalupe space, snake in hand, legs fully uncovered, displays her own energy and control.

Together these Guadalupe texts echo the resolution of many Chicana activists who clarified, once and for all, that “the issue of freedom and self-determination of the Chicana—like the right of self-determination, equality, and liberation of the Mexican
community—is not negotiable” (F. Flores, 1971, p. 1). This resolution was echoed from various quarters by Chicanas seeking to combat sexism within Chicano studies, to develop supportive services, foment sisterhood, and explore the linkages between sexism, racism, patriarchy, and economic exploitation. Then, as now, Chicana feminism embraced multiple contestations and practices of resistance.

Writing Us into the movement script documents one such contestation: the challenge to the Manifest ChicanO, but this is only one part of the story. The Mujer story is prefaced by another narrative of struggle in which we (brown people) challenge the you of dominant discourse in an effort to alter the relations of cultural production with alternative ethnic subjects. The mujer story is punctuated by a challenge to mainstream feminist discourse for its shadowing of race and class under an ideal universal (white) woman and the upper-class text milieu of her texts—someone who has been more easily assimilated within dominant discourse than her sisters across the linguistic tracks. These are sisters/hermanas who speak in different barrios of literary production and incorporate multiple histories of feminism within the continental Americas. They have given the universal woman a brown body, a Spanish accent, codes to switch, a history of domination and cultural suppression, and a contentious dialogue with the Manifest ChicanO.
These Chicana sisters have also contested the nationalist tendency to remove sex from politics and vice versa. Following their footsteps, contemporary Chicana writers and poets have opened up the gate to human sexuality, giving Chicana subjects back their desire (both heterosexual and gay), and they have interrogated the sexual privilege of Chicano males within increasingly complex formulations that democratize cultural discourse from various positions of similarity and difference. These stories are also her/stories—the stories of Chicana activists, feminists, mujeres—and they merit further consideration by you (feminists, nationalists, and Marxists) who follow the paths of alternative discourses of identity as they resist and transform subjectivity from the multiple borders of ethnic subjection and domination.
Figure 4. Yolanda López, "Victoria F. Franco: Our Lady of Guadalupe" (1978).

Figure 5. Yolanda López, "Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe" (1978).