

# "I am Joaquin"

By RODOLFO "CORKY" GONZALES

I am Joaquin,  
Lost in a world of confusion,  
Caught up in a whirl of a gringo society,  
Confused by the rules, Scorned by attitudes,  
Suppressed by manipulations, 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 am Cuauhtemoc,  
Proud and Noble Leader of men, King of an empire,  
civilized beyond the dreams of the Gachupin Cortez,  
Who also is the blood, the image of myself.

I am the Maya Prince.  
I am Netzahualcoyotl,  
Great leader of the Chichimecas.  
I am the sword and flame of Cortez the despot.  
And

I am the Eagle and Serpent of the Aztec civilization.  
I owned the land as far as the eye could see under the crown of Spain,  
and I toiled on my earth and gave my Indian sweat and blood for the  
Spanish master,  
Who ruled with tyranny over man and beast and all that he could trample  
But . . .

THE GROUND WAS MINE.

I was both tyrant and slave.

As Christian church took its place in God's good name,  
to take and use my Virgin strength and Trusting faith,

The priests both good and bad, took

But

gave a lasting truth that  
Spaniard, Indian, Mestizo  
Were all God's children  
And from these words grew men who prayed and fought  
for their own worth as human beings, for that  
GOLDEN MOMENT  
Of  
FREEDOM.

I was part in blood and spirit of that courageous village priest  
Hidalgo in the year eighteen hundred and ten  
who rang the bell of independence  
and gave out that lasting cry:  
El Grito de Dolores,  
"Que mueran los Gachupines y que viva la Virgen de Guadalupe"  
I sentenced him who was me.  
I excommunicated him my blood.  
I drove him from the Pulpit to lead a bloody revolution for him and me I  
killed him.  
His head, which is mine and all of those who have conic this way,  
I placed on that fortress wall to wall for Independence.  
Morelos!  
Matamoros!  
Guerrero!  
All Compañeros in the act,  
STOOD AGAINST THAT WALL OF INFAMY  
to feel the hot gouge of lead which my hands made.  
I died with them . . . I lived with them  
I lived to see our country free.  
Free from Spanish rule in eighteen -hundred- twenty-one.  
Mexico was Free  
The crown was gone  
but

all his parasites remained and ruled and taught with gun and flame and  
mystic power.  
I worked, I sweated, I bled, I prayed and  
waited silently for life to again commence.  
I fought and died for Don Benito Juarez Guardian of the Constitution.  
I was him on clusty roads on barren land  
as he protected his archives as Moses did his sacraments.  
He held his Mexico in his hand on  
the most desolate and remote ground  
which was his country And this Giant  
Little Zapotec gave not one palm's breadth  
of his country's land to Kings or Monarchs or Presidents  
of foreign powers.

I am Joaquin.  
I rode with Pancho Villa, crude and warm.  
A tornado at full strength, nourished and inspired by the passion and  
the fire of all his earth, people.

I am Emillano Zapata.  
"This Land This Earth Is OURS"  
The Villages  
The Mountains  
The Streams  
belong to Zapatistas.  
Our life  
Or yours is the only trade for soft brown earth and maiz.  
All of which is our reward, A creed that formed a constitution for all  
who dare live free!  
"This land is ours . . . Father, I give it back to you.  
Mexico must be free . . .'  
I ride with Revolutionists  
against myself.  
I am Rural Course and brutal,  
I am the mountain Indian, superior over all.  
The thundering hoof beats are my horses.  
The chattering of machine guns'  
are death to all of me:  
Yaqui  
Tarahumara  
Chamula  
Zapotec  
Mestizo  
Español

I have been the Bloody Revolution,  
The Victor,  
The Vanquished,  
I have killed and been killed.  
I am despots Diaz and Huerta and the apostle of democracy  
Francisco Madero.  
I am the black shawled faithful women who die with me  
or live depending on the time and place.  
I am faithful, humble, Juan Diego, the Virgen de Guadalupe,  
Tonatzin, Aztec Goddess too.

I rode the mountains of San Joaquin. I rode as far East and North as the  
Rocky Mountains  
And all men feared the guns of Joaquin Murrietta.  
I killed those men who dared to steal my mine,  
who raped and Killed my Love my Wife  
Then  
I Killed to stay alive.  
I was Alfego. Baca, living my nine lives fully.  
I was the Espinoza brothers of the Valle de San Luis.  
All, were added to the number of heads that in the name of civilization  
were placed on the wall of independence.  
Heads of brave men who died for cause or principle.  
Good or Bad.  
Hidalgo! Zapata!  
Murrietta! Espinozas!  
are but a few.

They dared to face The force of tyranny of men who rule  
by farce and hypocrisy I stand here looking back, and now I see the  
present  
and still I am the campesino I am the fat political coyote  
I, of the same name,  
Joaquin.

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 . . .  
The Indian has endured and still emerged the winner,  
The Mestizo must yet overcome, and the Gachupin will just ignore.  
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 sometimes sell my brother out and reclaim him  
for my own when society, gives me token leadership  
in society's own name.

I am Joaquin, who bleeds in many ways.  
The altars of Moctezuma I stained a bloody red.  
My back of Indian Slavery  
was stripped crimson from the whips of masters who would lose their  
blood so pure when Revolution made them pay Standing against the walls  
of Retribution, Blood . . .  
Has flowed from me on every battlefield  
between Campesino, Hacendado Slave and Master and Revolution.  
I jumped from the tower of Chapultepec into the sea of fame;  
My country's flag my burial shroud;  
With Los Niños, whose pride and courage  
could not surrender with indignity their country's flag . . . in their land.

To strangers now I bleed in some smelly cell from club.  
or gun. or tyranny.  
I bleed as the vicious gloves of hunger  
cut my face and eyes, as I fight my way from stinking Barrios  
to the glamour of the Ring and lights of fame or mutilated sorrow.  
My blood runs pure on the ice caked  
hills of the Alaskan Isles, on the corpse strewn beach of Normandy,  
the foreign land of Korea and now Viet Nam.

Here I stand  
before the Court of Justice Guilty for all the glory of my Raza to be  
sentenced to despair.  
Here I stand Poor in money Arrogant with pride  
Bold with Machismo Rich in courage and Wealthy in spirit and faith  
My knees are caked with mud.  
My hands calloused from the hoe.  
I have made the Anglo rich yet Equality is but a word, the Treaty of  
Hidalgo has been broken  
and is but another treacherous promise. My land is lost  
and stolen,

My culture has been raped, lengthen  
the line at the welfare door and fill the jails with crime.  
These then are the rewards this society has For sons of Chiefs  
and Kings and bloody Revolutionists.  
Who gave a foreign people all their skills and ingenuity  
to pave the way with Brains and Blood  
for those hordes of Gold starved Strangers  
Who changed our language and plagiarized our deeds  
as feats of valor of their own. They frowned upon our way of life  
and took what they could use.  
Our Art  
Our Literature  
Our music,  
they ignored so they left the real things of value and grabbed at their  
own  
destruction by their Greed and Avarice  
They overlooked that cleansing fountain of nature and brotherhood  
Which is Joaquin.  
The art of our great señors Diego Rivera  
Siqueiros Orozco is but another act of revolution for the Salvation of  
mankind.  
Mariachi music, the heart and soul of the people of the earth,  
the life of child, and the happiness of love  
The Corridos tell the tales of life and death, of tradition,  
Legends old and new, of Joy of passion and sorrow of the people:

who I am.  
I am in the eyes of woman, sheltered beneath  
her shawl of black, deep and sorrowful eyes,  
That bear the pain of sons long buried or dying, Dead  
on the battlefield or on the barbwire of social strife.  
Her rosary she prays and fingers  
endlessly like the family working down a row of beets to turn around and  
work and work  
There is no end.  
Her eyes a mirror of all the warmth and all the love for me,  
And I am her And she is me.  
We face life together in sorrow.  
anger, joy, faith and wishful thoughts.  
I shed tears of anguish as I see my children disappear behind the shroud  
of mediocrity  
never to look back to remember me.

I am Joaquin.  
I must fight And win this struggle for my sons,  
and they must know from me Who I am.  
Part of the blood that runs deep in me  
Could not be vanquished by the Moors  
I defeated them after five hundred years,  
and I endured.  
The part of blood that is mine  
has labored endlessly five-hundred years under the heel of lustful

Europeans  
I am still here!

I have endured in the rugged mountains of our country  
I have survived the toils and slavery, of the fields.  
I have existed in the barrios of the city,  
in the suburbs of bigotry, in the mines of social snobbery,  
in the prisons of dejection, in the muck of exploitation  
and in the fierce heat of racial hatred.  
And now the trumpet sounds,  
The music of the people stirs the  
Revolution, Like a sleeping giant it slowly rears its head  
to the sound of Tramping feet Clamouring voices Marlachi strains  
Fiery tequila explosions The smell of chile verde and  
Soft brown eyes of expectation for a better life  
And in all the fertile farm lands, the barren plains,  
the mountain villages, smoke smeared cities

We start to MOVE.  
La Raza!  
Mejicano!  
Español!  
Latino!  
Hispano!  
Chicano!  
or whatever I call myself,  
I look the same  
I feel the same  
I cry  
and  
Sing the same  
I am the masses of my people and I refuse to be absorbed.  
I am Joaquin  
The odds are great but my spirit is strong  
My faith unbreakable  
My blood is pure  
I am Aztec Prince and Christian Christ

I SHALL ENDURE!

**Rodolfo Gonzales**, boxer, civil rights organizer and poet, died on April 12, 2005.

## La Guera

*Cherrie Moraga*

It requires something more than personal experience to gain a philosophy or point of view from any specific event. It is the quality of our response to the event and our capacity to enter into the lives of others that help us to make their lives and experiences our own.

Emma Goldman\*

I am the very well-educated daughter of a woman who, by the standards in this country, would be considered largely illiterate. My mother was born in Santa Paula, Southern California, at a time when much of the central valley there was still farm land. Nearly thirty-five years later, in 1948, she was the only daughter of six to marry an anglo, my father.

I remember all of my mother's stories, probably much better than she realizes. She is a fine story-teller, recalling every event of her life with the vividness of the present, noting each detail right down to the cut and color of her dress. I remember stories of her being pulled out of school at the ages of five, seven, nine, and eleven to work in the fields, along with her brothers and sisters; stories of her father drinking away whatever small profit she was able to make for the family; of her going the long way home to avoid meeting him on the street, staggering toward the same destination. I remember stories of my mother lying about her age in order to get a job as a hat-check girl at Agua Caliente Racetrack in Tijuana. At fourteen, she was the main support of the family. I can still see her walking home alone at 3 a.m., only to turn all of her salary and tips over to her mother, who was pregnant again.

The stories continue through the war years and on: walnut-cracking factories, the Voit Rubber factory, and then the computer boom. I remember my mother doing piecework for the electronics plant in our neighborhood. In the late evening, she would sit in front of the TV, set, wrapping copper wires into the backs of circuit boards, talking about "keeping up with the younger girls." By that time, she was already in her mid-fifties.

\*Alix Kates Shulman, "Was My Life Worth Living?" *Red Emma Speaks*. (New York: Random House, 1979), p. 188

Meanwhile, I was college-prep in school. After classes, I would go with my mother to fill out job applications for her, or write checks for her at the supermarket. We would have the scenario all worked out ahead of time. My mother would sign the check before we'd get to the store. Then, as we'd approach the checkstand, she would say - within earshot of the cashier — "oh honey, you go 'head and make out the check," as if she couldn't be bothered with such an insignificant detail. No one asked any questions.

I was educated, and wore it with a keen sense of pride and satisfaction, my head propped up with the knowledge, from my mother, that my life would be easier than hers. I was educated; but more than this, I was "la guera": fair-skinned. Born with the features of my Chicana mother, but the skin of my Anglo father, I had it made.

No one ever quite told me this (that light was right), but I knew that being light was something valued in my family (who were all Chicano, with the exception of my father). In fact, everything about my upbringing (at least what occurred on a conscious level) attempted to bleach me of what color I did have. Although my mother was fluent in it, I was never taught much Spanish at home. I picked up what I did learn from school and from over-heard snatches of conversation among my relatives and mother. She often called other lower-income Mexicans "braceros", or "wet-backs", referring to herself and her family as "a different class of people." And yet, the real story was that my family, too, had been poor (some still are) and farmworkers. My mother can remember this in her blood as if it were yesterday. But this is something she would like to forget (and rightfully), for to her, on a basic economic level, being Chicana meant being "less." It was through my mother's desire to protect her children from poverty and illiteracy that we became "anglocized"; the more effectively we could pass in the white world, the better guaranteed our future.

From all of this, I experience, daily, a huge disparity between what I was born into and what I was to grow up to become. Because, (as Goldman suggests) these stories my mother told me crept under my "guera" skin. I had no choice but to enter into the life of my mother. / *had no choice*. I took her life into my heart, but managed to keep a lid on it as long as I feigned being the happy, upwardly mobile heterosexual.

When I finally lifted the lid to my lesbianism, a profound connection with my mother reawakened in me. It wasn't until I acknowledged and confronted my own lesbianism in the flesh, that my heartfelt identification with and empathy for my mother's oppression - due to being poor, uneducated, and Chicana — was realized. My lesbianism is the avenue through which I have learned the most about silence and

oppression, and it continues to be the most tactile reminder to me that we are not free human beings.

You see, one follows the other. I had known for years that I was a lesbian, had felt it in my bones, had ached with the knowledge, gone crazed with the knowledge, wallowed in the silence of it. Silence *is* like starvation. Don't be fooled. It's nothing short of that, and felt most sharply when one has had a full belly most of her life. When we are not physically starving, we have the luxury to realize psychic and emotional starvation. It is from this starvation that other starvations can be recognized — if one is willing to take the risk of making the connection - if one is willing to be responsible to the result of the connection. For me, the connection is an inevitable one.

What I am saying is that the joys of looking like a white girl ain't so great since I realized I could be beaten on the street for being a dyke. If my sister's being beaten because she's Black, it's pretty much the same principle. We're both getting beaten any way you look at it. The connection is blatant; and in the case of my own family, the difference in the privileges attached to looking white instead of brown are merely a generation apart.

In this country, lesbianism is a poverty-as is being brown, as is being a woman, as is being just plain poor. The danger lies in ranking the oppressions. *The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression.* The danger lies in attempting to deal with oppression purely from a theoretical base. Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place.

When the going gets rough, will we abandon our so-called comrades in a flurry of racist/heterosexist/what-have-you panic? To whose camp, then, should the lesbian of color retreat? Her very presence violates the ranking and abstraction of oppression. Do we merely live hand to mouth? Do we merely struggle with the "ism" that's sitting on top of our own heads?

The answer is: yes, I think first we do; and we must do so thoroughly and deeply. But to fail to move out from there will only isolate us in our own oppression - will only insulate, rather than radicalize us.

To illustrate: a gay male friend of mine once confided to me that he continued to feel that, on some level, I didn't trust him because he was male; that he felt, really, if it ever came down to a "battle of the sexes", I might kill him. I admitted that I might very well. He wanted to understand the source of my distrust. I responded, "You're not a woman. Be a woman for a day. Imagine being a woman." He confessed that the thought terrified him because, to him, being a woman meant being



El poema "Heritage" de Lorna Dee Cervantes revela la discrepancia entre las expectativas culturales y lingüísticas por parte de los demás hacia una mujer de apellido hispano, y su falta de identificación con lo hispano y con el español:

Heritage  
 I look for you all day in the streets of Oaxaca.  
 The children run to me, laughing,  
 spinning me blind and silly.  
 They call to me in words of another language.  
 My brown body searches the streets  
 for the dye that will color my thoughts.  
 But Mexico gags  
 "ESPUTA"  
 on this bland pochaseed.  
 I didn't ask to be brought up tonta.  
 My name hangs about me like a loose tooth.  
 Old women know my secret,  
 "Es la culpa de los antepasados"  
 Blame it on the old ones.  
 They give me a name  
 that fights me.<sup>9</sup>

El verdadero apellido de la poeta, Cervantes, sugerido mediante la imagen de "my name" que "hangs about me like a loose tooth", exacerba la discrepancia entre las expectativas de la raza y herencia hispana, y la constitución bicultural del yo poético que no responde a esa tradición en su totalidad. En búsqueda de sus raíces hispanas, —"Heritage/I look for you" . . .—, la hablante poética reafirma su distanciamiento ante la tradición y lengua de sus padres. En este caso no podemos dejar de asociar la voz poética con la autora, ya que su apellido es el mismo del autor del *Quijote*, la gran novela de la literatura hispana. Se podría decir que su apellido la persigue como una sombra. Ella, sin embargo, escribe poesía y no prosa, en inglés, no en español, y desde una perspectiva definitivamente feminista. Por eso se denomina "pochaseed", supuesta traidora de su herencia hispana. En calidad de pocha, su cuerpo, de piel oscura, es un vehículo cargado de pensamientos "blancos", sin color.<sup>10</sup> El Otro para Cervantes es el mexicano de México que la acusa de liberación sexual ("ESPUTA" sugiere "es puta") y de "tonta" (v. 11) por no hablar español; igualmente sus antepasados configuran un "otro" ya que le dieron un apellido conflictivo con su identidad. Nótese el uso del español para referirse a los insultos por parte del enemigo, aquí el mexicano mismo, y para aludir a sus antepasados, con quienes la hablante poética no se puede identificar.<sup>11</sup>

Tal dualidad ontológica entre el nombre, la supuesta identidad hispana, y la realidad interior del individuo bicultural se expresa asimismo en otro poema de Cervantes, "Refugee Ship", en el cual la voz poética se presenta como una refugiada que nunca encontrará su propio *locus*:

Mama raised me without language.  
 I'm orphaned from my Spanish name.  
 The words are foreign, stumbling  
 on my tongue. I see in the mirror  
 my reflection: bronzed skin, black hair.

La hablante po  
 americana, ni  
 en español, de  
 literario de la  
 ausencia de di  
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 bastante comú

Sandra Mar  
 tinguiendo la l  
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Por otro lac  
 y cultural que

El cambio de co  
 "pero" y "but"  
 lingüística y on  
 en una identida  
 vantes:

Esteves con  
 alusión a Lolita  
 toda su obra po  
 en los Estados l  
 década de 1950  
 políticos puerto  
 nueva fuerza e i  
 la imagen de las