

**Because I refuse to be quiet and remain uncomfortable  
y porque debe haber otro modo de ser,  
Rosario Castellanos**

**Irene Lara**

witty, khaki-wearing, liberal professional where I was the  
gracious token brown intern  
your enlightened display of camaraderie  
“we’re really the same, you and I”  
assuming I would be pleased with the reassurance that I could  
be part of the club  
“you’re ambitious, not like the rest”  
you laud my individual agency, without realizing  
my success is tied to the success of “the rest”

highly caffeinated, rich Mexican on your way to join your  
family for a forced vacation  
you talk non-stop: your work, your opinions, your ulcers...  
“Oh you have a college-degree from the U.S.?”  
I’m deciding where to send my daughters. Ages 4, 7, and  
9....  
but from California?! Oh no, too sunny, too easy,  
too diverse. *Mis hijas merecen* a real education.”

part-time consultant at home, so you could be a better mother,  
while husband executes in the Silicon Valley.  
you hire me to tutor your 7-year-old in Spanish: “Play in  
Spanish,” you exhort, “do everyday things, foreign language  
made fun.”  
I pick up your daughter from school and we walk the pet  
llamas.  
But then you have us make hors d’ouvres - in Spanish,  
for fun.

sweet lady who likes the ethnic arts and works in the  
Chancellor’s office

so sweetly you ask “Were you a migrant farm worker?”  
so sweetly you ask “Why do you call yourself Chicana when  
the word has such a negative connotation?”  
so sweetly you confide “My husband has Spanish ancestry,  
have you ever been there?”  
Spain is so beautiful.”

baggy jeans, designer watch, drink-toting friendly guy at  
the dance club  
“Oh, Latina! How spicy!”  
Later I wished I would have responded “Yes, like Lorena  
Bobbit. Fuck off.”  
But, I’m glad I just walked away - that time.

dear blue-eyed housemate who acts jealous because I get to  
be “Latina, ethnic, hip.”  
“Well, at least I’m queer (and part Irish),” you recall.  
you dye your hair blonder, tan, bathe your fat white dog, &  
play golf with your “mentor”  
you ask if I have any cute Latina friends, mixed? “I want a  
dark woman, they’re so much more passionate, no bland  
vanillas.”

white tight permed hair, wrinkles, and a dried red line for  
lips  
your look of disgust when bumped at the San Diego Milita-  
rized Airport  
where “citizen patrols”  
stalk dark people  
your amazement when I confront your icy glare, in English,  
“It WAS an accident.”

Ethnic Studies students in the hallway of the Natural Re-  
sources Department  
abrasive, wiry orange haired,  
you shout from an office doorway: “WE’RE trying to work,  
take the noise elsewhere! THIS class is always so loud”

from afar, you do not wait for a response, you do not want to talk to us "noise-makers."

Gesticulating, undulating, timbales-playing old Mambo King Friends and I proudly and loudly swing our arms and shake our hips

Being out-staged by an exuberant Dominicana whom you "let" be your vocalist,

You strike out like a dying dog in a cage:

"Be quiet Mexicans, the Migra is gonna get ya!"

I sit up front on the 51 making small talk with you, late-night Black bus driver.

"So you're from the Southern border... had a great little vacation there, but definitely wouldn't want to live there."

"Yeah, nice weather, but lots of racism."

"Oh no, no, no, - I'm afraid of all of those illegals."

wide-eyed Chicano academic proudly *presente* at a Chicana NACCS panel

you take up space, quietly, lots of space, shifting, more space brushing elbows, taking notes, thinking but not thinking because

as you nod your head, I'm sweating, alert at the edge of my seat.

I can talk back like bell hooks

And, I can decide to be silent like Trinh Minh-ha

Yet, like Audre Lorde, I won't believe my silence protects me

I can keep my secrets like Rigoberta Menchú

I won't tame my wild tongue like Gloria Anzaldúa

I will write my poems and break things like Sandra Cisneros

I protect/protest my life like Cherríe Moraga

I call for the impossible like Ana Castillo

I release my fear like Joy Harjo

Won't let you fill the silences with your own words,  
your own desires  
Those silences that once painfully resonated, I hereby retract

I take back all my soundlessness

And, I let it go.



Debi Cooper, *Storytellers of the Past*, Delia, Julia and Josefina. Redwood City, California. September 3, 1996.

Caliche (preface)

Josi Mata

We swallowed  
each others breath  
drawing  
    kisses from  
each others hearts  
    our breasts together  
    our hips  
    and legs and cunts binding  
fused in soul

I am here  
    because I kissed her

I am here  
    because I inundated my body with her

she has entered me  
and my dreaming is heavy now

Caliche

traveling my  
pain through my dreams  
on to a December sky

my chest is heavy with the past  
and here i lay  
unable to release me  
from horror  
    that I made a name for

phantoms i said okay to  
come and make your home