

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

A Latina/Chapina Artist Speaks Through Poetry and Photographs

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I come from a small town in Guatemala where it rains almost every day; we call this constant rain *el chipi chipi*. Tactic, with its emerald mountains emanating the fresh aroma of pine trees, is my hometown. As the sun goes down, a dense fog envelops the town. At the break of dawn, *mi gente* walk the streets ready to sell or to buy produce in the mercado.

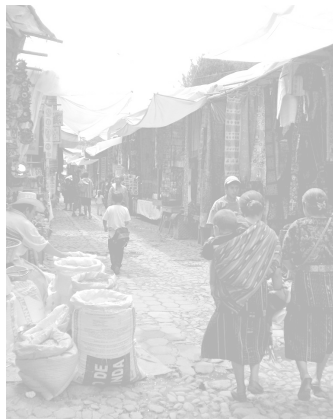
Cierta vez caminamos
Junpech xojb'ebik

En lo mas alto del
templo de La Danta
Mi gente canta en Poqomchi'

Su flor y canto se origina
de las montañas mas
antiguas de Nakbé

Sus proverbios
nos alientan
a brotar como

Orquídeas palpitantes;
luna llena bajo
un sexto sol.



Once, we walked
Junpech xojb'ebik

At the peak of
La Danta temple,
my people sing in Poqomchi'

Their flower and song
comes from the oldest
mountains of Nakbé

Their sacred proverbs
enlighten us
to sprout like

Pulsating orchids—
a new moon
under the sixth sun.

Once, we walked

This is where I grew up until the age of ten. This is where I immersed myself in the vibrant canvas of my town—by the riverbank, gathering balls of auburn clay to create and shape my toys. It was there that I learned to appreciate my energy, when I realized my hands couldn't keep still; they still can't. Tactic's rich environment nurtured a creative soul, with its colorful landscape and the cadence of my people's song.



I immigrated to the United States with my two older sisters and my mother when I was ten years old. We took a twenty-one-day journey in search of a peaceful life. I can't get over my mother's courage. She brought us here illegally, having only a second grade education. Her feminine intuition doesn't cease to amaze me. Yes, my family and I left Guatemala behind to find a better life, but we never forgot where we came from.

Tejiendo La Niebla

Descalzo uno emigra
a tierras extrañas

hay quienes no olvidan,

hay quienes se ensartan
su patria en el alma.

—La tierra no tiene fronteras
murmuran los pies reventados

las huellas que implantan
trasmiten nostalgia;

hay tierras calientes
que a veces se enfrían;

hay campos dorados
que tejen la niebla;

hay volcanes que arrojan
sus piedras de pomo;

Y uno aquí, escupiendo
cenizas en la lejanía.

—La tierra no tiene fronteras
suspira la arboleda

El árbol exiliado no logra evitar
que su fruto florezca

¿Qué culpa tiene la almendra
que el viento la arrastre
y la engendre en tierras ajenas?

Knitting the Fog*

Barefoot, one immigrates
to foreign lands—

There are those who
do not forget;

Those who interweave their
Motherland into their soul.

“The soil knows no border,”
Whispers their splintered feet.

Their footprints, entrenched,
radiate with nostalgia.

There are warm soils that,
at times, become frozen;

Golden fields that
blur with the fog;

There are volcanoes that
expel rocks of pumice.

And I'm over here, spitting
ash from afar.

“The soil knows no border,”
groans the green forests.

The exiled tree cannot prevent
its seed from flourishing.

What fault does the almond seed
have if the wind drags
it to foreign lands
where it propagates?

**English translation by José Hernández Díaz*

Our journey transformed my life, the things I saw and heard on the road taught me the meaning of courage and survival, as well opened up many doors for my family and me. Mother risked her life not once, but twice; I forever will be a testimonio to her valor. In my new life, poetry forever emerges, as evidence of our survival. Along with many others I, too, became a child of the border.



Frontera de mi lado

Caminábamos
con pies derretidos

en lo oscuro
del camino/

serpentino
pasaje.

platicábamos a
p a u s a s

en el polvo
de la nada/

Nuestra piel
tostada nos abrigó;

con bocas
pegajosas

hasta tropezarnos
con los húmedos

flotamos
como lanchitas

selladas
de la sed.

labios
del río.

salpicadas de
agua dulce/

Nuestras
miradas

Río Bravo
de mi lado.

agua salada.
Llegamos

quemadas,
a s u s t a d a s

Río Grande
de tu lado.

al otro
lado—

de ver tanto
fantasma/

Ninguno quiso
beber de ese

Tu lado.
Mi lado.

Border on my side

We walked
with melted feet

chatting in
s l o w m o t i o n

our viscid
mouths

sealed
with thirst.

Our
burnt gazes

a f r a i d
to see the ghosts/

in the darkness
of the path/

in the emptiness
of dust/

until we
stumbled upon

the moist lips
of the river:

Rio Bravo
on my side,

Rio Grande
on your side.

No one
drank from

the serpentine
passage;

our bronzed flesh
kept us warm

as we floated
in the water

resembling
small boats

splattered
with

fresh water/
salty water.

We disembarked
on the other side—

Your side.
My side.

The United States became the site of my socialization in later childhood and adult life. Although I got married at the age of eighteen and had my only son at twenty, I had the opportunity to attend college and graduate school. My marriage lasted fourteen years, until two years ago, when my husband and I decided that it was in our best interest to go our separate ways. Throughout the course of my marriage, I was always restless—my hands would not remain still—the urge to create overwhelmed me. Throughout college, I found a way to balance my life as a mother, wife, and student, while working thirty hours a week. Besides taking the required curriculum to become a teacher, I took art courses to keep my sanity—art to feed my soul and a career for financial support. Through painting, sewing, ceramics, photography, and writing, I was able to make sense of my life.

It was in high school that I began to take pictures: I was photographer and yearbook editor during my senior year. In my twenties, I developed love for literature when I gained access to books—we were too poor to afford them when I was a child. In Guatemala, we barely had enough money to purchase a pencil or the fabric for our school uniforms. I was fortunate to have a grandmother who was a storyteller and seamstress—it was her yarns that sparked my love for literature as an adult. Because of the memories and experiences I carry, I have a need to express joy, love, pain, and grief on paper and through photographs, which I consider life poems. I am grateful for a consciousness that allows me to criticize what is unjust. There are many reasons why I am compelled to write:

And This Is Why I Write:

I write for the voices / That have been silenced. / The ones that have been
 raped, / Exploited, and scorned / I write for the voices / That age motionless. /
 For the ones who flee their land / For the ones who have had their land /
 Robbed from their own hands. / For those who are not allowed / To speak

in their native tongue. / For those who express themselves / In the most
beautiful and colorful tones. / But most importantly, / I write for myself. / I
write at 5:30 in the morning / Because I can't sleep. / I write to let it all out. /
Regardless of my line breaks— / No matter where I place / My commas, or
my periods. / Whether my poem rhymes or / If it is metered. / I write to avoid
swallowing the / Unforgiving realities that plague / My sisters and brothers
everywhere. / Yes, my poetry is personal.

Deadline: Desperation Cry

Our Mothers / Our Sisters
Women in Ciudad Juárez

Have been found
Beaten / Raped / Burned
Stabbed / Shot / Strangled

“Left nipple bitten off”
“Right breast severed”

Found dead
Shoelaces tied together
Found unidentified

Every year since 1993,
Women in their
Teens / Twenties / Thirties

Are found dead in the
Desert of Ciudad Juárez

Could it be:
The maquilladoras instead
Of the maquiladoras?

What about the machismo
And the Marianismo
And the drug cartels?

What about Abdel Sharif
Los Rebeldes / Los Chóferes?

Can the copycats afford
To pay otra mordida?

Will the wooden cross
Erected near the border
Bring our sisters back
Or attract more tourists
Like flies drawn to blood?

When will the conspiracy end?
When will these atrocities end?
Less questions / More answers



Exist:

I will not allow you to tell me how to:
Dress Dream Smile Speak Look Study
Write Think Exercise Sleep Eat
Feel Touch Question Rise Sit
Socialize Drive Dance Wander
Sound Conceptualize Feel
Admire Bleed Budget
Compete Rain Fear
Drown Regret
Submit Fly
Exist
I am a woman.

Through creative work, I have learned to embrace the lessons life has given me thus far. Love, grief, rage, and happiness—I internalize them all. Surprisingly, it all comes out well. Life struggles and triumphs, and my Chapina roots have definitely shaped my art. As I mature, my photography and writing more clearly focus on the human condition. To document the lives of others, I love to travel everywhere, but above all, I enjoy visiting America Latina. I take photographs of every thing and every one, but no matter who or what I capture with my lens, whether it is a picture of a landscape or a flower or even a male, my female gaze is always there, like a duende. Many have said my art is rooted in female empowerment themes. I don't do it deliberately. Some have asked if I consider myself a feminist artist. The response is always the same: I let my art speak for itself. My creative spirit does not intend to categorize my expressions in any way. I am who I am, and I simply think and act like a human being with her own legacy and history to honor—Chapina/Latina is what I have become and embrace.