



Association of Mexican American Educators Journal

A peer-reviewed, open access journal

Volume 20 Issue 2

2026

AMAE Special Double Issue, Part 2

Muxerista Pedagogies and Praxis:

Art, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance and Restoration

Guest Editors

Anita Tijerina Revilla, PhD

California State University, Los Angeles

Roberto C. Orozco, PhD

University of Minnesota–Twin Cities

Editors

Patricia Sánchez, PhD

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonio J. Camacho, PhD

AMAE, Inc.

Associate Editors

Julie L. Figueroa, PhD

Sacramento State

Lucila D. Ek, PhD

The University of Texas at San Antonio

Managing Editor

Jerry Romero Jr., PhD

The University of Texas at San Antonio

XxicanXx Ancestor Testimonio

Osa T. Hidalgo de la Riva, PhD

Queer Chicana Artist, Writer, and Scholar

Bianca Quintanilla Melton, PhD

University of Texas at Austin

XxicanXx Ancestor Testimonio

Osa T. Hidalgo de la Riva, PhD

Queer Chicana Artist, Writer, and Scholar

Bianca Quintanilla Melton, PhD

University of Texas at Austin

Abstract

“XxicanXx Ancestor Testimonio” is a photo essay in which Drs. Hidalgo de la Riva and Quintanilla Melton reflect upon the Muxerista pedagogy of Celia de la Riva Rubio, a Chicana educator and activist in the East Bay, California, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Drawing from de la Riva Rubio’s example and their own experiences in education, Hidalgo de la Riva and Quintanilla argue that Muxerista pedagogy is an intergenerational and archival praxis that lives in family memory and community. Muxerista pedagogy remains relevant as a praxis of resistance when access to education is fraught.

Keywords: Muxerista pedagogy, Chicana educational histories, intergenerational knowledge, testimonio and archives, educational resistance

Introduction

Royal Eagle Bear Productions (directed by Dr. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva), in partnership with the Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective (directed by Dr. María Cotera), recently acquired archival images from Celia de la Riva Rubio, a Chicana educator and activist in the East Bay, California, during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.¹ Towards the end of de la Riva Rubio's life, she published a collection of her poetry and essays, *Lagrimas y Cadenas/Chains and Tears: Gay Feminist Prose and Poetry*, in which she self-identified as a "homophile." This photo-essay argues that Muxerista pedagogy is an intergenerational and archival praxis that lives in family memory and community struggle. Through Tía Celia's photographs, poetry, and teaching legacy, we demonstrate that Muxerista pedagogy and praxis are a living lineage of queer Chicana feminist liberation-building. Let us begin by introducing ourselves.

Osa T. Hidalgo de la Riva

Dr. Osa T. Hidalgo de la Riva (b. 1954) is a lesbiana XxicanxX artist, writer, and public scholar whose work bridges analog and digital technologies to preserve and celebrate Chicana feminista and queer cultural legacies. I began creating poetry on a typewriter gifted by my paternal Aunt, Estela Hidalgo Ruiz, and documenting family life with a Polaroid camera. A lifelong activist and cultural worker, I draw on intergenerational memory, activism, and digital humanities to honor her family's contributions to Chicana movements. Known for my hybrid creative scholarship, I embody love as a decolonizing force in digital storytelling and in my Muxerista moviemaking, movies that envision matrilineal, *lesbiana* utopias. Since 2022, I have been working with the Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Collective to digitize the Mujeres de la Riva collection and bring scholarly and public attention to its historical importance for women of color and queer genealogies.²

¹ In 2023 Chicana por mi Raza (CPMR) led a field school at UC Santa Cruz focused on the digitization of the Mujeres de la Riva archive preserved by Dr. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva in multiple storage units. After the field school, it was determined that Celia de la Riva Rubio's book, *Lagrimas y Cadenas* should be republished and that her personal archive in Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico, would be recovered and digitized by CPMR. In the summer of 2026 the CPMR research team (Dr. María Cotera, Analía Fierro, María Pérez, and Penelope Quetzal Wright Cotera) returned to Santa Cruz for two weeks to digitize materials collected in Morelia the year before (2025) by Osa and Sylvia Morales. Over 3000 materials from Celia de la Riva Rubio's collection were scanned during this research trip.

² This work has been supported by multiple institutions and organizations, including the US Latinx Digital Humanities grant (University of Houston) that started the digitization process of the mujeres de la Riva archive with Erendina Delgadillo from Oakland Museum of Art. The 2023 Legacy Artist Fellowship from the California Arts Council and the Arts Council, Santa Cruz served as a fiscal sponsor. UC Santa Cruz Film and Digital Media,

My Aunt Sally/Tía Celia was the Vice President of the Association of Mexican American Educators (AMAE). We include photos of my collection of XxicanxX³ *lesbiana* poetry, as well as samples of the publications by the other womxn⁴ members of the de la Riva family. I have introduced Bianca (my co-author) to a wider community of Chicana/e/x⁵ scholars and activists through our collaboration. While I have herstorically used the term *Mujerista* to identify my filmwork and activism, after reading the work of Revilla (2004, 2021), I am now adopting the *Muxerista* spelling with an “x” over *Mujerista* with a “j” in my work. *Muxerista* is a living term, and we have barely scratched the surface, but we are energized to teach and learn.

Bianca Quintanilla Melton

In my third year of graduate school at UT Austin, I took the course “Chicana Feminisms” taught by Dr. María Cotera. “Chicana Feminisms” demonstrated that I must thank the Chicana activists who came before me for expanding educational access for girls like me growing up in South Texas. When Gloria Anzaldúa was a doctoral student in the Program of Comparative Literature at UT Austin forty years ago, she wanted to write a dissertation on Chicano literature and Chicana feminism. However, she was forced to leave because her advisors deemed Chicano culture and politics as an invalid area of study. During the past seven years, I benefited from a supportive committee of advisors who encouraged me to develop my project on Chicana allegory.⁶

A decisive moment in my dissertation journey occurred in Dr. Cotera’s course. Dr. Osa Hidalgo de la Riva joined the class as a guest speaker on a fateful day. The screening of her *Mujería* film trilogy lingered in my mind, but I would not understand why until years later. The connection between Osa’s work and that of the other authors in my dissertation — Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sandra Cisneros — gradually became clearer as I

the Dolores Huerta Latinx Center, Library Special Collections, and the community, particularly Barrios Unidos of Santa Cruz supported Osa’s work as well. <https://chicanapormiraza.org/content/las-mujeres-de-la-riva>

³ Osa exercises poetic license through her creative spelling choices.

⁴ As an example of Osa’s creative spelling choices, womxn is distinct from “womyn,” a feminist term that was intended to de-center men but has also been criticized for excluding trans women by positing that “real” women have female genitalia. Rather than associate ourselves with middle-class white feminism which has propagated anti-trans rhetoric, we prefer the more inclusive “womxn.”

⁵ The terms Chicanx and Chicane have come into use because the traditional spellings of Chicano and Chicana reinforce the gender binary. Chicanx and Chicane signal inclusivity towards gender-expansive individuals.

⁶ I devote a chapter of my dissertation, “Chicana Allegory: The Politics of Myth and Identity in Literature and Film” (2025), to an examination of Dr. Hidalgo de la Riva’s genealogical engagement with allegory.

continued to study the *Mujería* films and developed a friendship with Osa. Like the other figures I study, Osa finds inspiration in pre-Columbian goddesses. What sets Osa's work apart is that it emerges from a family that encourages creativity and community involvement. A research grant funded my travel to Santa Cruz, CA, to interview Osa, and there I got to spend more time with her and understand how she carries on the family tradition of living by *mujerista* (muxerista) principles. Derived from Black feminist Alice Walker's concept of "womanism," *mujerista* (muxerista) refers to women who love other women sexually and/or nonsexually and create art for individual and collective liberation (de la Riva 6). As we shall see in Osa's selection of family photos, her Aunt Sally/Tía Celia was an SF East Bay Area Chicana educator who empowered, supported, and advocated for generations of Asian American, Black, and Chicana/Latina/o students. In Osa's dissertation, she enumerates seven Muxerista principles⁷; while they are geared toward filmmaking, they are also generally relevant to the creative process. Osa's Muxerista principles align with Revilla's (2004) formulation of Muxerista pedagogy and praxis. According to Revilla, "a *muxerista* is a person whose identity is rooted in a Chicana/Latina feminist vision for social change committed to ending all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and citizenism" (48). Muxerista pedagogies intertwine education with activism, performed by individuals or groups to better their communities. Muxerista pedagogies are situated within the lineage of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968). Osa's and Revilla's pedagogy explicitly rejects the "banking" paradigm in which the educator transfers their knowledge to the student. To conceive of the student's mind as an empty vessel filled with inert facts impoverishes knowledge. This banking paradigm does a

⁷ The Muxerista Moviemaking principles read as follows: "Number one, the Muxerista filmmaker loves herself unconditionally and often radically. She is [a] woman-identified woman whether she has experienced emotional or physical intimacy with another woman. The Alice Walker definition says, 'A woman who loves herself loves other women sexually and/or nonsexually.' Number two is getting the job done, willfully, using nonconventional methods, those outside of the traditional Hollywood studio system. It is the successful production and aim towards the liberation of self and others. It is focused on making access to technology by any means necessary, its ideology informs its praxis, its praxis or methodology is informed by a responsible set of personal politics, this is always in flux, changing and transforming with the changing times. Number three: Muxerista movies are educational but in a nontraditional sense, not indoctrinating or subordinating all people to a WASP patriarchal mindset and hegemony. Rather, they offer transformational experience about people, events, issues, and points of view usually not dealt with, underrepresented, and misrepresented in mainstream media. Fourth, Muxerista filmmakers are activists in nature and reclaim our stories from a women-of-color and children-of-color POV. Fifth, familia is inclusive of all peoples, ages, religions, colors, abilities, classes, genders, and sexualities. Six is teaching others and including our communities in the production process as crew members. Seven, taking risks, being outlaws to create change and transformations for healthy beings" (de la Riva and Blackwell 2022, 222).

disservice to students by failing to consider them as individuals who enter the classroom with unique perspectives, life experiences, and educational backgrounds. Instead of treating her students as passive recipients of information, Tía Celia cultivated classrooms where students' lived experiences shaped the curriculum, inviting them to write, reflect, and see their own communities as worthy of study. Knowledge did not flow in one direction from teacher to student, but circulated as shared inquiry and collective growth.

Muxerista principles conceive of knowledge creation as a collaborative process that activates a shared consciousness among teachers and students. Because Revilla and de la Riva's frameworks of inclusivity resist normative principles of knowledge, they expand what can be considered knowledge. Furthermore, the anti-hierarchical impulse of Muxerista pedagogies is perhaps one of the best defenses against efforts to eradicate modes of resistance to oppression.

Muxerista pedagogies are more relevant than ever, given that education and access to it are fiercely contested. The elimination of the departments of ethnic studies, gender and sexuality studies, and comparative literature across the country underscores the urgency of understanding how Aunt Sally/Tía Celia used creativity to liberate herself and her students. As a self-described "homophile," Tia Celia used poetry to express a part of herself that had remained closeted due to anti-homosexuality laws for most of her life. As an educator, she helped her students develop their minds and claim their agency. Aunt Sally's example reminds us that freedoms are never won in perpetuity, but are a never-ending struggle.⁸

⁸ While there is scant scholarship documenting the Muxeres de la Riva's writing, activism and culture work, María Cotera's recent book, Fleshing the Archive: An Intimate Genealogy of Chicana Knowledge Praxis (University of Texas Press, 2026) devotes an entire chapter to documenting this queer genealogy of Muxerista praxis.

Figure 1

Aunt Sally, c. 1960s



Figure 2

Aunt Sally's membership card as Vice President of the Association of Mexican American Educators, in Stockton, CA, (date unknown)

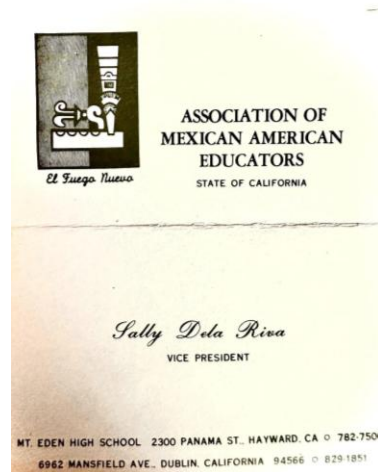


Figure 3

Aunt Sally and her car, c. 1960s-1970s?



Saturday, June 21, 2025-10 am, Osa Bear free(w)Rite with Augie Robles, UCSF Mt. Zion Hospital.

I talked with folks who invited me to publish some essays this week. Of course, my eyes were open, and my heart was ready. Let me recall the excitement, the honor, and the good work. I think of the basic story part A: to gather, excavate, and collect the *papeles*, images, buttons, and memorabilia of Tía Celia's life, work, and play. It has been a challenge – juggling

personal health issues – and making material (wo)manifest, mixing Morelia, Michoacán, México, with the merriment of rainbow-colored San Panchita, Califas, Aztlán, during Pride Month. Girlie – let your head spin that for a while.

The nurse assistant comes in as I go away with my friend, this Saturday morning. The morning is just right, bright, and ready for more poems, prayers, and promises. My thought progression flies from this personal pen, pleasing my sensory perceptions across this page as I think about or long for home. It won't be long, as I await an unexpected ultrasound. In the meantime, I disconnected from the local TV station's electromagnetic antenna waves.

The latest rave is that my niece Liliana is practicing her daily road-rage bursts of impatience and foul language across the ages; all to say, that child drives now, responsibly. She is learning what it means to pay her rent and car note, fill her car's gas tank, pay auto insurance, and keep her eyes on the road. An early 8:05 am call informs me she's camping over at my home for a few days, while her mama, my baby sister Laura, remakes her casita by city, county, and state codes and ordinances.

And then there are the happenstances that take us to distant lands to bring the wealth from the late great tía Celia's hands, heart, and mind – from there to here, do you understand? As this is told in honest conversations.

Just this morning on local news KRON 4 - the SF Bay Area, has a section on how asshole RUMP is going to target (especially Califas) curriculum for queer, gay, LGBTQIA+ youth. When it seems like we barely come closer to attending to the special youth, with special needs, the government, which is NOT my government, takes away funding for programs that are currently helping and healing the hearts and hands of youth born with two-spirits and sensibilities we all need to grow with. But noooOOOoo, estúpido is so f+^%*ing afraid of difference, so scared of the sacred world of diversity. Pendejó – so limited to one-dimensional staleness. But time will tell. We've gone this route before. As bigger bombs continue to fall, I am on my way to talk with the goddesses. Timely conversations save our nations, and yes, our special children.

When I was a child, I remember painting a little tiny suitcase with brightly colored hearts, a sun, and other simple symbols we've known across the ages. I realize Tía Celia specifically left that message for me to eventually re-encounter. To my great surprise, only recently, after so many decades of separation, I opened its old latch, an antique archival object

of Tía Celia's. I didn't even know she had kept it this many times and in so many places. Upon opening it, I gasped! It was overflowing with black-and-white *fotos* from the past! The majority were images of her students, her "gang," and other jewels. JACKPOT!

Her first teaching experience was a little Chinese kindergarten class in old Oaktown, Chinatown. The babies were already 4 or 5 years old, and the back of the photos was labeled 1953! Older than me - at 70 years old, and since I was retouching what Tia touched today in 2025, I was having a sacred pedagogical conversation with my queer Latinx/e, XxicanXx ancestor.

Figure 4

Osa's students in East LA, CA, c. 1980



Figure 5

Poet-teacher Osa and students in Stockton, CA, c. 1980



Figure 6

Aunt Sally teaching Social Studies to her students (date unknown)



Figure 7

Cover art and poem by Mama Lola de la Riva

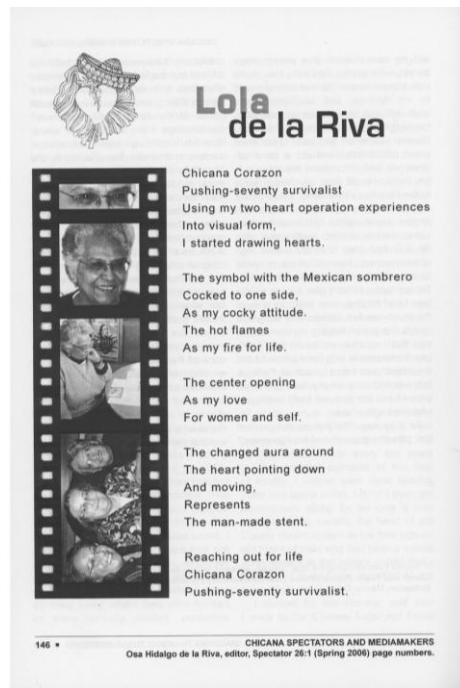
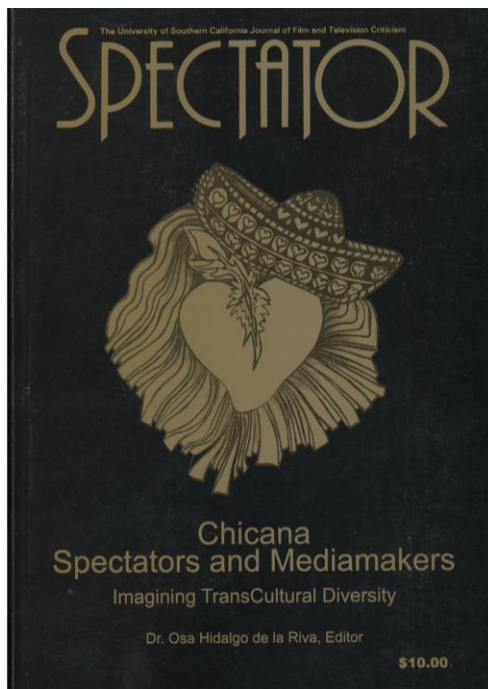


Figure 8

Aunt Sally's collection of poetry and prose, *Lágrimas y Cadenas* (1994)

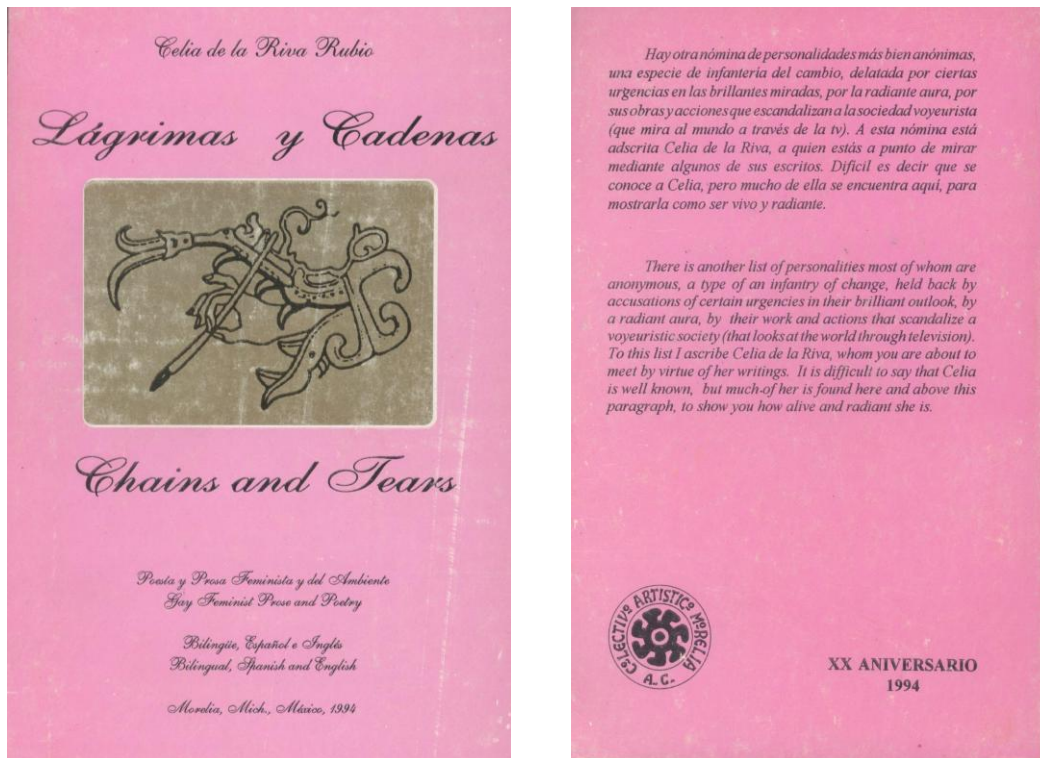


Figure 9

Aunt Sally's poem in *Lágrimas y Cadenas* is dedicated to her nieces, Osa Bear and Liz Hidalgo de la Riva

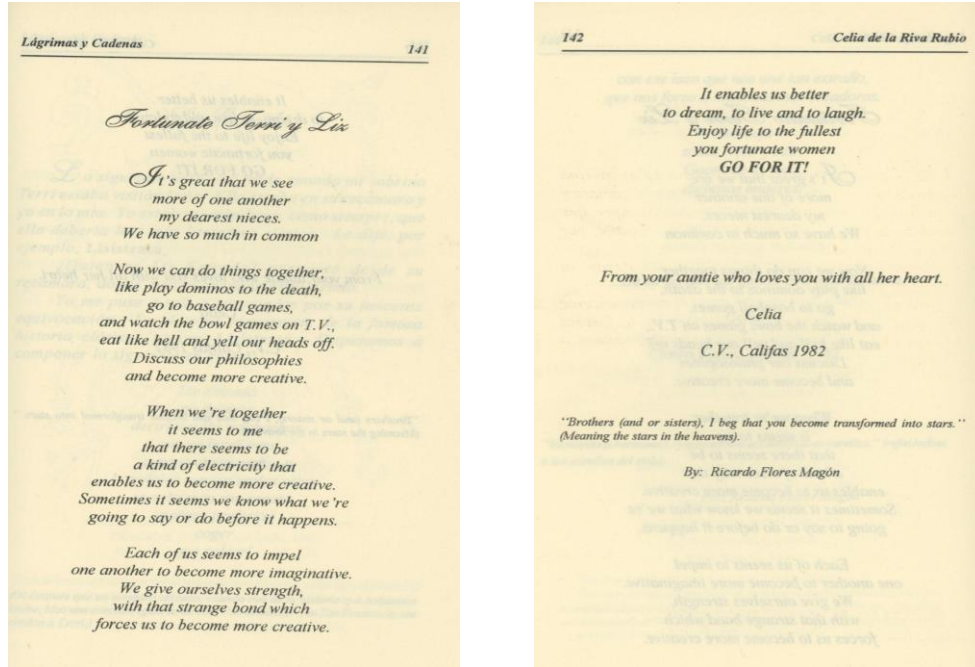


Figure 10

Liz Hidalgo de la Riva's collection of poetry was published in 1976, when she was 16 years old

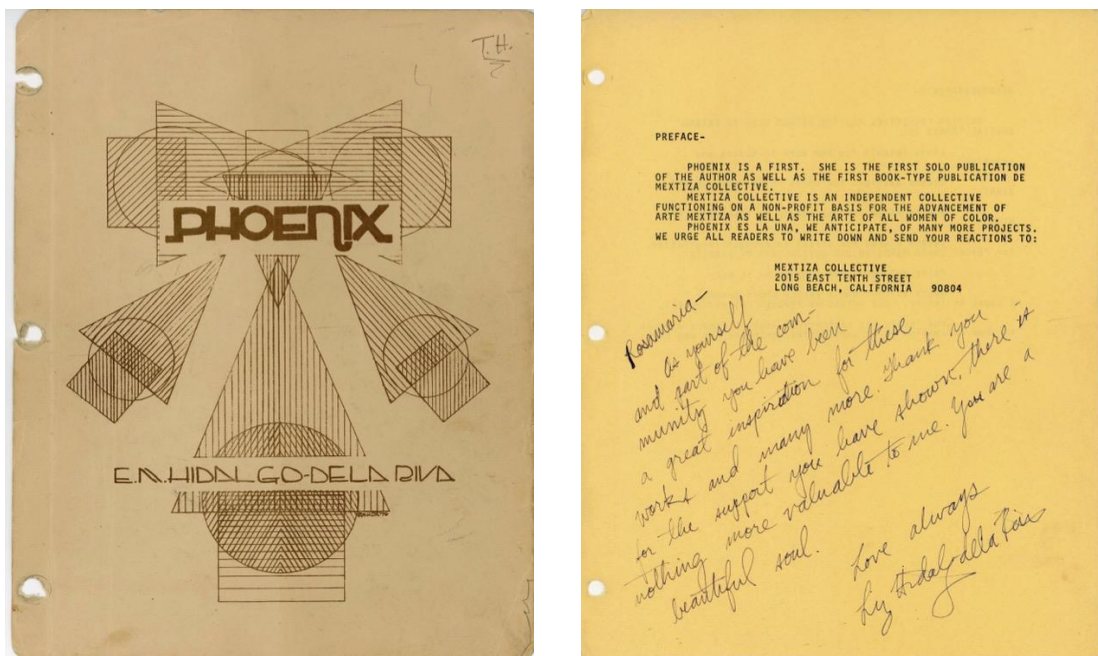
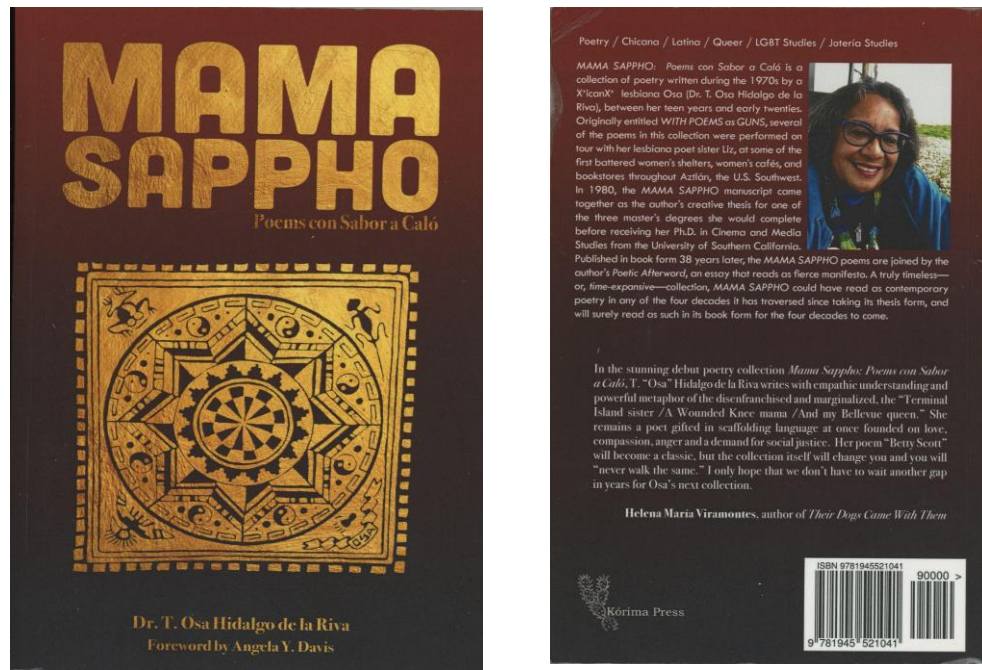


Figure 11

Osa's collection of poetry, *Mama Sappho: Poems con Sabor a Caló* (2018). Submitted initially as her master's thesis in the English/Creative Writing Program at SF State University in 1980, with a Foreword by Angela Y. Davis.



Conclusion

Although *Mujerista* and *Muxerista* have different origins, both are grounded in the principles of Women of Color feminisms. These pedagogical frameworks were developed through distinct yet overlapping trajectories. They reflect a shared liberatory consciousness committed to collective transformation. Naming this shared foundation situates Tía Celia's archival legacy within a broader intergenerational tradition of queer Chicana feminist praxis.

The depths of Aunt Sally/Tía Celia's archives have yet to be fully excavated. When Osa reopened the painted suitcase and encountered decades-old photographs of her aunt's students, she entered into a *muxerista* pedagogy dialogue across time. The archive became a classroom where ancestors and descendants engaged and learned from each other. As we continue to gather and interpret Tía Celia's archives, we recognize that this work is activating a living *Muxerista* consciousness. Her photographs, poems, and pedagogical commitments remind

us that queer Muxerista praxis has always flourished in classrooms, kitchens, community centers, and quiet acts of courage. In honoring her legacy, we reaffirm that Muxerista archives are not relics of the past. They are urgent, evolving practices of collective liberation.⁹

⁹ We would like to thank Chicana por Mi Raza for digitizing these images; Analía Fierro for helping retrieve the graphics; Sylvia Morales for helping bring Aunt Sally's archives back to California in May 2025; Vanessa Nava for her online Muxerista syllabus. The graphics on the cover of *Phoenix* were designed by Osa's sister Liz Hidalgo de la Riva in 1976; thanks to Chandler Melton for traveling with me, Bianca, from Austin to Santa Cruz to interview Osa. We dedicate this pedagogical Muxerista photo essay to Mama Lola Chola de la Riva c/s ¡Sí Se Puede!

References

- de la Riva, L. H. (1976). *Phoenix*. Mextiza Collectiva.
- de la Riva, L. (2006). "Chicana Corazón." *Spectator: Chicana Spectators and Mediamakers* edited by O. H. de la Riva, 26(1), 146.
- de la Riva, O. H. (2004). *Mujerista Moviemaking: Chicana Filmmakers Sylvia Morales and Lourdes Portillo*. [Doctoral dissertation, USC]. ProQuest, <https://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/mujerista-moviemaking-chicana-filmmakers-sylvia/docview/305121953/se-2>.
- de la Riva, O.H. (2018). *Mama Sappho: Poems con Sabor a Caló*. Kórima Press.
- de la Riva, O. H. & Blackwell, M. (2021). Visions of utopia while living in occupied Aztlán. In D. Espinoza, M. E. Coteria, & M. Blackwell (Eds), *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (pp. 207-224). University of Texas Press.
- Freire, Paulo. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. continuum.
- de la Riva Rubio, C. (1994). *Lágrimas y Cadenas/Chains and Tears*. Colectiva Artístico Morelia.
- Revilla, A. T. (2009). Are all Raza Womyn queer? An exploration of sexual identities in a Chicana/Latina student organization. *NWSA Journal*, 21(3), 46-62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20628194>