



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

Muxerista Reflexiones and 2025 Nuestra Graduation Ceremony

Leda Ramos, MFA

California State University, Los Angeles

Muxerista Reflexiones and 2025 Nuestra Graduation Ceremony

Leda Ramos, MFA

California State University, Los Angeles

Abstract

This article is a Muxerista-historia of Leda Ramos, a local Los Angeles artist, activist, and educator. In this piece, she begins by tracing her academic and artistic journey to the Muxerista community. She then presents the transcript of her speech to the CSULA: Nuestra Grad, Class of 2025, to showcase some of the Muxerista values that guide her work.

Keywords: muxerista pedagogy, artist, ethnic studies, graduation, Central American

Introduction

On May 17, 2025, I participated as an invited speaker at the California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA) graduation, “Nuestra Grad”, a cultural graduation honoring Chicanx/Latinx, Central American, South American, Caribbean, Indigenous, and Afro-Latinx graduates, parents, families, faculty, and administration. The speech I delivered at graduation highlighted key milestones in my art and academic journey, and expressed my hope of inspiring young scholars as they continued to sow seeds for the future. This opportunity to weave and connect my pedagogical praxis into this special issue on Muxerista pedagogy allowed me to provide more context and further develop my contribution to Muxerista spaces and communities.

I begin by naming my own academic and artistic journey, how I have arrived in the Muxerista community. I then present the transcript of my speech to the CSULA: Nuestra Grad, Class of 2025, to showcase some of the Muxerista values that guide my work.

Muxerista-Historia

As I continue to understand my social art practice in the classroom and in my everyday life as an artist, I have become accustomed to being an activist, *activista*, academic worker, archivist, *feminist*, and internationalist. More recently, I have felt inspired by the scholarship and personal leadership of Dr. Anita Revilla, Chair of the Department of Chicanx Latinx Studies at Cal State LA, with whom I have developed a bond and nurtured a kinship with Muxerista and Jotería Studies. Furthermore, my Central American *feminist* practice as an artist and professor for over forty years aligns with contemporary muxerista pedagogy. Knowledge, theory, and practice are always in flux, so this kinship and relational process is dynamic. I am reminded of Angela Davis's reflection on the increasing use of the term “intersectional” to describe her work over the previous three decades. She has openly shared that, in addition to working within the contexts of “solidarity,” “Black feminism,” “internationalism,” and “womanism,” she became comfortable using the term “intersectional” as many of us now do. But while these terms feel familiar, they are distinct within art and academic spaces that visualize a more complex Muxerista space. For example, when I embody the word *feminista*, I do not visualize a U.S.-based experience but rather the lived experience with my Salvadoran mother, who transgressed many gendered roles, and the women who fought as *guerrilleras*, some becoming activists exiled in Los Angeles after the Central American civil wars.

In 1994, I was in the M.F.A. program at the Mason Gross School of Art at Rutgers University–New Brunswick, at the time steeped in the discourse of cultural and racial identity politics and representation. My MFA Thesis, “CASA,” was inspired by the work of hooks et al. (1994) and by their identification of “cultural genealogy of resistance” (p. 22). I was attempting, via my art installation work, to reconstruct memories of home, of spaces and experiences, geographic, cultural, and psychological, that formed my mental construction of identity and understanding of the built environment. My MFA graduate exhibition, “*Kinder Garten: Trampas de la Fe*”, connected themes of my childhood with recent immigrant Salvadoran parents, displacement, poetics of space, memory, the complexities of assimilation, and language.

Thirty years later, as a professor at Cal State LA, I continue to transform the built environment through art installation. In my art installation work at the university I re-envisioned our spaces and enacted love and care for our students and faculty through the installations, exhibitions, and public events at Cal State LA including the “UMAS/MECHA-King Hall” installation for the 50th anniversary of the East LA Walkouts (Leda Ramos and Stefany Bravo, 2018) and the “*Central American Families: Networks and Cultural Resistance*” installation and exhibition for the 50th Anniversary Chicana Latinx Studies Department (Leda Ramos and Alejandra Lemus, University Library, 2018-2019). Outside the university, I completed the public art project, “*Dolores Huerta Square Street Naming and Community Fair in Boyle Heights*” (Leda Ramos, Emiliana Guereca, and Alice Bag with Council District 14, 2019). I also contributed to the redesign of the Cal State LA Department of Chicana Latinx Studies office to be a more welcoming space for our students, staff, faculty, and community members. I believe that all communities deserve beautiful spaces in which to live and do creative work. This social transformative work was always created pro bono, outside of art capitalism relations or conventional transactional interactions.

In Los Angeles, I collaborated with many queer and non-queer artists/activists in the mid-1980's as we often found ourselves at the same art openings, parties, and dance clubs. I actively supported VIVA Lesbian and Gay Latino Artists of Los Angeles, a small non-profit focused on promoting LGBTQ+ Latino artists (b. 1987), and many of my artist friends created exhibitions, performances, and art programs. Many of these personal relationships are still a part of my world today, and I bring that spirit of lived inclusion and long-term solidarity into my teaching, artist, and activist modes of being and doing.

My art and Central American camaraderie with Chicane artists at Self Help Graphics and Art included Chicane/Latine queer and non-queer artists beginning in 1984 (Cornejo 2023). During this time, I curated the exhibition, “*L.A. and Santa Barbara Artists Protesting the U.S. Intervention in El Salvador*”, at the Casa de la Raza Cultural Center in downtown Santa Barbara. It was a time of international solidarity movements, and our social justice advocacy propelled us to collaborate and work collectively with Central Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Chicane, Anglos, Black, Asian communities, and LGBTQ communities. The 1980s AIDS crisis also opened spaces of solidarity with the arts, activism, and the urgency of liberation. In Los Angeles in the 1980’s, Chicane Latine art circles pre-social media were much smaller, intersectional, and inclusive, perhaps by sheer spatial and economic necessity, as coalition building amplified across multiple spaces.

I regularly remind my students that there were many years of Chicane Latine cultural work to create larger and more funded arts and culture institutions that currently represent and affirm our communities. Black, Indigenous, Asian and Latine Museums today include: Plaza Cultura y Artes Museum (2011), Museum of Latin American Art (1996) Japanese American National Museum (1992), California Afro American Museum (1977), Chinese American Museum (2003), and the first major exhibition of Chicane art at UCLA Wight Gallery, “*CARA, Chicane Art: Resistance and Affirmation, 1965-1985*,” was in 1990. From the late 1970s and much of the 1980s we Chicane/Latine folks in Los Angeles relied heavily on the arts community spaces of Plaza de La Raza (b. 1970) and Self Help Graphics and Art (b. 1972) on the East side and the Social and Public Art Resource Center (b.1976) and Highways Performance Space (b.1989) on the Westside of LA. All four spaces continue to support our Latine artists and communities today. Throughout the 1990s, there were also alternative community spaces, including Luna Sol Café, which operated near MacArthur Park from 1996 to 2003, and the Troy Café, which operated from 1990 to 1995.

As a committee member of the 2024 National Association for Jotería Arts, Activism, and Scholarship (AJAAS) Conference at Cal State LA, it felt affirming to contribute and draw on those 25 years of experience and intergenerational knowledge. For AJAAS, I organized the film screening and panel for the documentary “*UNIDAD: Gay and Lesbian Latinos Unidos*” and the panel “*Central American Queer Artists at Self Help Graphics and Art*” to amplify queer and Central American camaraderie in art spaces in Los Angeles.

Creating a safe and creative learning environment that holds a wide range of cultural contexts and intergenerational experiences, race, gender, sexuality, and class, with care and humility, is fundamental to my work and aligns with Muxerista pedagogy. I have lived and experienced the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist, machista, assimilationist structures within my Central American family and in broader U.S. contexts all my life, never losing sight of my actions with others and how we can maintain and improve them for future generations. As a tomboy girl in a Catholic environment, my rebellion started early in life, and, as in most immigrant homes, I have also come to appreciate the creative resilience, imagination, vision, and “rasquache” aesthetics.

Today, I continue to resist against white supremacy, patriarchal, racial capitalist, and imperialist structures and strive to reclaim the social transformative and radical hope of a creative life in my teaching. My academic work aims to mentor love, compassion, respect, honesty, and solidarity while developing student voices and critical thinking. I desire to mentor others to draw from our collective imagination, always honoring the spirit of our ancestors. Central to this healing work are connections to contemporary artists and access to artworks, archives, documents, and film. Nearest to my heart is my current art/archive project, “*Central American Memoria Histórica Archive*” (CAMHA) at the University Library. CAMHA is a collaborative work of healing, community-based research, cultural knowledge, and historical and contemporary community histories of mostly Central American women artists/poets/and cultural workers for cultural affirmation and cultural resistance.

My artmaking, teaching, and activism have consistently gelled in my university and community work. I continue to collaborate with others to challenge racism, reduce harm, and create beauty and social justice for students, staff, and faculty. These creative strategies and commitment to each other are then modeled and embodied in the classroom with students as we dialogue, march, speak out, and organize to challenge what arises to oppress our community on and off campus. I firmly believe that my students bring a wealth of complex knowledge and valuable experience to the classroom. I learn daily from students, faculty union comrades, and colleagues across many departments, and as an Academic Senator within the College of Ethnic Studies' shared governance space. I am inspired by the emerging “Jotería and Muxerista Studies” in the Chicana Latinx Studies Department and the Women, Gender,

and Sexuality Studies Department at Cal State LA, expanding our shared vision, and am honored to contribute to this work centered on love, hope, and creativity.

In the following, I share the transcript of my keynote speech at the Cal State LA Nuestra Grad celebration for the Class of 2025. In my speech, I share my over forty years as an artist and educator in Los Angeles.

Leda Ramos, Keynote speaker (transcript)

Welcome, students, family, faculty, and staff, to Nuestra Grad Celebration 2025

May 17, 2025

Celebrating our Chicanx/Latinx, Central American, South American, Caribbean, Indigenous, and Afro-Latinx students and their families.

¡Bienvenidos, estudiantes, padres, familias y maestros de Cal State LA a Nuestra Grad 2025! Vamos a primero reconocer que estamos todos sobre la tierra originaria de los Tongva. Uso mi sombrero hoy para dar gracias a los braceros y a todos los campesinos y sus familias. I honor the labor of my father and all the campesinos and braceros who labor in the fields seven generations back and seven forward!

The theme for this year is “*Harvesting our Past, Planting our Future. Cosechando el Pasado, y Sembrando Para el Futuro*”. Yo soy la hija de un campesino y este tema me toca el corazón.

I want to acknowledge that you and your families are beautiful. I want to invoke the spirit of the past—the 1960s and 1970s “*Brown is Beautiful*” we saw chanted on the streets of LA. Within the context of that time, that was so radical. We learned from our siblings in the Black Panther Party that “*Black is Beautiful*” and that we also could declare our self-love and affirm our culture in our fight for civil rights in the Chicanx Movement and broader social movements in Latin America. Today, more than fifty years later, we amplify to say our Latinx communities are Black/Brown/Indigenous/Queer/Trans and all are beautiful across multiple borders and spatial geographies.

I want to connect past roots from the era of the 1960s and 1970s with the seeds you have sown as GRADUATES, not as nostalgia, but to honor our elders and to seek to adapt new liberatory strategies of survival. YOU are the continuum of the very seeds our ancestors have sown and harvested across borders, across languages, across our Pacha Mama. You are the present and future stewards, spirit protectors, thriving legacy of your families, chosen families, and their families, at a time of violent erasure and harm, so we have to double down on our

protection. You are a testament, as graduates, to the solidarity of family and others, that we will rethink and refuse the capitalist “American dream” narrative and prioritize our humanity, love, and care for others in our communities.

Root History

First, the remembering and reconnecting of my historical memory from the 1960s and 1970s. These are my **formative seed years**, and I share as a form of connection. I am Leda Ramos, madre, feminista, an artist, a Salvadoreña, a labor organizer, and a teacher of Chicanx Latinx Art and Film in the Department of Chicanx Latinx Studies, which resides within the second College of Ethnic Studies in the nation. I want to briefly share a little of my artistic and academic journey that has led me to Cal State LA. I was born in Echo Park, Los Angeles, in 1961. I am the daughter of Salvadoran immigrants who came to LA in the 1950’s, and my ancestors are Maya, Nawat Pipil, and Lenca. My father, Jose Efrain Ramos, was an “agricultur,” a campesino, a farmer of café and maiz, who, by chance, in 1955, when he migrated to LA, worked as a waiter. I also learned he was a former farmer when I discovered a “machete” under his bed and asked him why!

And my mother, Maria Argentina Flores, a seamstress, worked in the garment industry in LA, sewing piecework at home, and was an entrepreneur with a small clothing business out of our garage in the informal economy, aiding undocumented Salvadorans fleeing the pre-civil war years in the 1970s. Three of my siblings were born in El Salvador, and four siblings, including me, were born in LA. My older sister, Francis, was born at General Hospital, and thankfully, my mother was not sterilized like more than a few Mexican American women would experience in the 1960s and 1970s. The remaining three siblings, including me, were born at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in East Hollywood because by 1961, my father was a labor union member with UNITE/HERE and had medical insurance.

I repeat, I was born in 1961—too young to experience the “Walkouts,” and yet I could feel the rise of the emerging and powerful generation of “Chicanx” communities. I have vivid memories of 1970 and can remember young Chicanx organizers with long hair boycotting grapes in front of our neighborhood Safeway Market. I was aware that I was brown and that there was no representation that I could see on our television or in films. There was no Spanish-language TV at that time. I was not Chicana or Mexican American, yet that space is critical to the historical, intersectional, and solidarity spaces of my life in Los Angeles and out in

the world. I am a Central American born in LA with an identity that makes me aware of complex transborder histories and political revolutions.

As a child, I didn't see myself on TV, but I knew almost every Motown song from the radio and was aware of music and the legacy of Soul and R&B, while loving the pop and rock songs of the Beatles, David Bowie, and the Rolling Stones. It was later that I learned about the appropriation of American Black culture and music and the profound connection to American, British, and Latin American Rock and Roll music. Here I want to say, "Go see the film *Sinners*," a film that explores the appropriation of Black culture, historical trauma, and the power of music and community in the face of oppression—and it also has vampire-like zombies. Even more deeply, I heard the music from my father's vinyl record collection—Javier Solis, Trio Los Panchos, Pedro Infante, Augustin Lara, y La Orquesta de Don Bosco de El Salvador. These records from Mexico and Central America were gold to me. Lifting my spirit to a place of connection to my parents and a homeland I had never visited until 1992, and the end of the Salvadoran civil war.

Yet while I was growing in, around, and with the omnipresent Mexican American and Chicanx communities, this space also included an everyday feeling of "almost" belonging that finally had expression in 1980, my first year of college at UC Santa Barbara. My PUBLIC political consciousness was raised through transborder activism when I joined CISPES—The Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, BUT my ROOT political consciousness was shaped by witnessing my parents, whose compassion and selflessness included housing and feeding many Salvadorans in the 1970s and 1980s in our home. It is the ROOT consciousness that is the reason I am an activist and artist today. It was the decades of public activism within the international solidarity and sanctuary movement and later the Zapatista Movement that led me as an educator, artist, and activist today, now organizing within the international solidarity movement for a Free Palestine. It was an honor to witness the pro-Palestine activism on our campus, the longest Gaza Solidarity encampment in the nation. Here, I want to acknowledge the students from five CSUs currently on a hunger strike. *La Lucha Sigue*.

For the last six years, I have been the founder/director of an art/archive project I have been working on at Cal State LA, the Central American Memoria Histórica Archive, housed in the University Library. It is my gathering of culturally affirming "seeds" that are healing my spirit and self, to leave for my children, and for you and your children, and anyone wanting to learn

more about Central American cultural workers in LA. I am so humbled to be able to be with you all in the classroom. Many of you have been archiving your digital photos, ruminating on your past and wondering about your future, delving into the root systems that form your histories. Honor your roots. Excavate your roots. Document your roots, draw maps. Come to terms with your roots and love yourself in all your imperfections and beauty.

SHEROES/ALUMNI of Cal State LA

It is customary in a speech for Latinx grads to quote our great legacy of scholars, activists, and artists—Gloria Anzaldua, Dolores Huerta, Berta Caceres, Aime Cesaire, Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Eduardo Galeano, and those whose work intersects with us—Malcolm X, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Yuri Kochiyama, Grace Lee Boggs, and more. You all have spent many years gathering and cultivating your sense of self and humanity via your knowledge building of significant scholars who embraced our cultural affirmation and cultural resistance. Today, I want to share just a few Cal State LA distinguished alumni who, like you, graduated from Cal State LA. All women. All sheroes who defied the odds, gender expectations as leaders and artists, and whose resilience to thrive and flourish in our city, I hope, inspires you.

Gloria Arellanes

Gloria Arellanes, a political activist, former member of the Brown Berets, and co-founder of "Las Adelitas de Aztlan," a Chicana feminist group active during the Chicana Civil Rights Movement. Arellanes, whose mother was Tongva, was told not to share that among the Chicana community growing up. Later, Arellanes not only defied Latinx conformity but would become a fierce Tongva elder in Los Angeles. You can find her archive in our University Library. Her famous letter calling out the sexism in the Brown Berets is legendary.

Ofelia Esparza

Ofelia Esparza is a Chicana altar maker whose work is informed by a deep spiritual belief in the traditional process of honoring our ancestors. Her altars start at Self Help Graphics and Art in East LA, and for nearly 40 years, Esparza has shared her knowledge and art about el Día de Los Muertos with people in schools, museums, community centers, prisons, and parks throughout the Los Angeles region and beyond.

Alice Bag

Chicana punk music legend Alice Armendariz was a philosophy major at Cal State LA. Her punk identity "Alice Bag" is well documented in the film, "Chinatown Punk Wars," and she

has written two books, *Violence Girl* about growing up in East LA and surviving racism and domestic violence as a child and *Pipe Bomb for the Soul*, where she writes about her year teaching in Managua, Nicaragua after the Sandinista Revolution victory in 1979 as her final thesis project. I was fortunate to work with Alice Bag when we honored civil rights activist Dolores Huerta at our CLS 50th anniversary celebration.

Bamby Salcedo

Bamby Salcedo is a national and international transgender Latina woman who earned her Master's Degree in Chicanx Latinx Studies and has been featured in many documentaries for her activism as the President and CEO of the TransLatina Coalition, a national organization that addresses the issues facing transgender Latinx communities in the US. I just saw La Bamby at the May Day march just a few weeks ago, and she is not going to let Trump dishearten our threatened Trans community! She is fierce!

Conclusion

Graduates. The “seeds” that we harvest today connect to the past and into the future as *mana* (food and spiritual sustenance). Embrace all the roots that spread out beyond geography and seek out your spirit protectors. Be a spirit protector.

Graduates, refuse and challenge the political absurdity of our times and live your lives steadfast with hope that we will adapt and thrive together. This is especially important at a historical moment when we are feeling threats to our cultural memory and the contributions we make on a daily level in Los Angeles today.

How do we reap a healthy “cosecha” or harvest while planting seeds of infinite hope into the future, as Dr. King has taught us—while caring, healing, protecting, and empowering our community of immigrants, trans folks, and women and children? How do we protect the decades of culturally affirming scholarship and work in our communities? First, know that you have strong and powerful ancestral roots and that, as Cal State LA graduates, you now join the legacy of distinguished alumni who have followed their liberatory spirit.

Like you, I have incredible Cal State LA memories, both great and small. It was an honor to have co-chaired the historic 50th anniversary of Chicanx Latinx Studies, connecting the roots of the first Chicano Studies founded in 1968 to the present and linked with Pan African Studies founded in 1969; co-organized the first Latinx Queer national conference to celebrate our Latinx LGBTQIA+ familia, to have used our radical imagination, and dreamt with many of you at

our Gaza Solidarity Encampment last year and today to be able to address you all amazing and beautiful graduates and families.

Graduates, we celebrate and recognize your years of hard work and sacrifice. Padres/Familia, we celebrate and recognize your years of hard work and sacrifice. Together, we plant and gather seeds as individuals. Today we celebrate the persistence and the harvest—the cosecha—you all have created as individuals and more importantly as a community, a collective. In case you haven't noticed, most of our Nuestra Grads are women. Today, you are all goddesses of Mother Earth –goddess intellectuals, poets, writers, artists, scientists, and activists. Graduates, you are also fierce young men and LGBTQIA+ family, and we love you all. Together we will survive. Together we will thrive, and together we will reap our prosperity one day at a time.

Together we oppose genocide and all state-sanctioned violence and prisons from Palestine, Sudan, El Salvador, and here in LA.

¡Del Río al Mar, Palestina estará LIBRE! (Leda)

¡Que Viva Palestina Libre! Que Viva! (students/faculty)

References

- Cornejo, K. (2023). Central America at Self Help Graphics: Comaraderie and artmaking in the City of Angels. In T. Reinoza & K. Davalos, *Self Help Graphics at fifty: A cornerstone of Latinx art and collaborative artmaking* (pp. 191-224). University of California Press.
- hooks, bell, Eizenberg, J., & Koning, H. (1994). House, 20 June 1994. *Assemblage*, 24, 22–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171188>
- Revilla, A. T. (2004). Muxerista pedagogy: Raza womyn teaching social justice through student activism. *The High School Journal*, 87(4), 80–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40364286>