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Muxerista Pedagogies and Praxis:

Art, Activism, and Scholarship as Resistance and Restoration

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We are Sacred

Susana “Ix Chel” Cáceres

Independent Performance Scholar

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Abstract

This is a performance-based writing piece performed on June 14th, 2025, in Berkeley, CA, as part of the *This Is My Body* program by the Novalia Collective in the Bay Area. *This Is My Body* is an experience designed for women of color to reclaim their narratives, take up space, and own their truths. In this written piece, Susana “Ix Chel” Cáceres, a queer embryonic immigrant, made in El Salvador and born and raised in Pico Union and South Central, Los Angeles, California, unceded Tongva territory, shared her narrative within a Muxerista pedagogy. The video of the work presented in this piece can be found at: <http://bit.ly/4agcRsD> (at 15:23 mins). It is important to note that Susana came into her Muxerista consciousness while at UCLA when she became part of Raza Womyn in 2001. In that safe space, she was able to come out to herself and begin to take the steps of empowerment to leave her toxic, straight, monogamous relationship and start standing in her power as the bruja, boss bitch she is today.

Keywords: performance, Central American, healing, muxerista consciousness, Indigenous ceremony

Introduction

This play sits within Muxerista pedagogy because I use storytelling and ceremony to share my personal lived experience and to weave the intersectionality of my identities and show how I have been able to not only survive, but thrive in the face of all the different types of oppression that I experience as a queer, woman of color who is the eldest daughter of immigrants.

I developed my class, racial, and political consciousness at Community Coalition (CoCo) in South Central, Los Angeles, when I joined their youth program, which later became SCYEA, South Central Empowered thru Action. I came into my gender, queer, Muxerista consciousness at UCLA when I joined Raza Womyn de UCLA. I came into my spiritual and indigenous consciousness when I was invited to sit in Indigenous ceremony, when I found my curandera teacher, and when I started singing on a Two-Spirit drum. These are all the experiences that are my source of power and Self, and that allow me to practice self-acceptance/ forgiveness, self-love, and purpose. It is the intersectionality of these experiences that supports me in the everyday struggle to overcome racism, classism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia.

I am able to see my Divinity because I know my ancestors. Even if I don't know my tribal name or language, my ancestors know me, and I know them. It is the indigenous wisdom and medicine that I speak of in this play that counters white supremacy and its ingrained storytelling and rituals.

This play can be used as a tool for trans, queer, immigrant, black, brown, and Muxerista students to see themselves reflected in the protagonist and identify with her as she stands in her power and claims all of her identities. It could be a conversation starter about how naming and claiming your Muxerista, feminist, indigenous, queer/trans identity can lead to self-empowerment and reverberate to healing and social justice.

It could be used as a tool to discuss unspoken forms of knowledge that arise through song, dance, storytelling, ceremony, altar-making, ancestral honoring, prayer, plant medicine, and other spiritual practices. How do these types of lived and passed down understandings speak to teachings in academia? Are there ways that we embody and carry knowledge that should be acknowledged and can add to academic teachings and theories?

It is my blessing and privilege to offer this writing and performance play/ceremony as a tool to remember who we are, honor our ancestors, and reclaim our power and sacredness.

We Are Sacred

I begin by singing a short verse of Tonantzin, an Aztec Mother Earth song, using my Hand Drum.

If I had one wish for humanity, for everyone that I love, it would be that they could remember the way sometimes I can remember.

Sometimes, when I am grounded and I'm in the flow, I can remember that I am Divine, and I can act from that place. I can access my Divine Self to help my Human Self. My Divine Self can show compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and love to my Human Self. I am reminded that mistakes are lessons and that I-am-not-my-trauma. I know, like all of us, I came here with a purpose, and I am meant to share it. I have my own unique magic, my own ancestral medicine, my own special sauce, you could say.

When I connect to my Divinity, I belong. I can tend to my feelings. I am a selenium Cancer after all. I can hone in on my needs and desires. I can honor and speak my truth. We are Divine Beings having a Human experience, and we are also Human Beings having a Divine Experience; both are true. We are on Purpose. We are exactly where we are meant to be. And we are Love. [In a whisper] And we like ourselves.

Mi Magia, Mi Medicina es Amor.

My Magic, The Medicine that I carry is Love.

My Special Sauce is Love, and I'm here to share with all of you.

First and foremost, I am in Love with My Self. I am a queer, hella gay, solo polyamourist, kinky, unicorn of Love. Pronouns: She/Her and Femme.

My journey began when my Soul decided to be conceived in San Salvador, El Salvador. I came to this country in my mother's womb when she was 5 months pregnant. While she was running, she had an asthma attack. We could have died, but we survived. And on July 17, 1974, I became the first person in my lineage to be born on this land, specifically on unceded Tongva land, Los Angeles.

Figure 1

Me at about 3 months with my Mami Lidia, 1974.



Figure 2

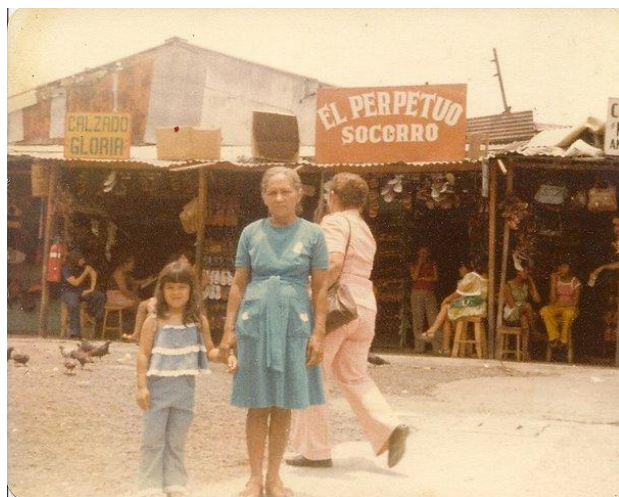
Celebrating my 2nd birthday in Pico Union, Los Angeles, 1976.



I had a really beautiful childhood. Not that it was perfect, but I had everything I needed, except my father. I had abundance, family, a beautiful home, structure, and most importantly, I had love, especially from my Mami and my Abuelita Carmen. That fundamental Love is ingrained in me that I am Love and that I deserve Love.

Figure 3

My first time in El Salvador at age 4 with my Abuelita Carmen, 1978.



Those first 9 years were amazing, and then, a lot of things changed in our lives. Like my Mama before me and my Abuelita before her, I was adultified, becoming a 3rd parent to my annoying little siblings, “deciding” at 13 to get my first job. That and socialization led me on a path of codependence, putting my feelings and needs last. And that led to being trapped in a 17-year relationship. From the age of 17 to 34, I was in a relationship where I took care of my ex to the complete detriment of My Self. I paid for our lives. I was scared. I endured sexual and emotional abuse. I was in the closet, and I told no one my whole truth. I was so far away from the person that I am today.

But even in the hardest of moments in my life, there was always this little fire inside of me, inside my gut, inside my heart, in my spirit, that knew that I deserved better. That knew that I deserved Love, that felt good to me. That knowledge, that fire, propelled me to get help for myself through therapy and finally, finally leave that relationship.

I came out of the closet, and I said, “You know what, I never want to be monogamous again! I’m good!” That experience, where my soul was dying, and I was so lost to myself, it allowed me to remember. Throughout the struggle of trying to figure out why I was so unhappy for so long, I still had that knowledge inside myself. That knowledge that we all have, that we all carry. Our connection to the Divine is in there; it’s in our bodies; it’s in our souls.

If I take the time to sing, to be grateful, to say a prayer, have a good cry, speak an affirmation for myself, do ceremony. If I set up an altar for myself with water, earth, fire, and air. If I sit in nature. If I experience pleasure. If I play or dance. If I treat myself like I wish my

father had treated me, like I wish my ex had treated me. If I honor myself, I can remember. I can remember to be kinder and more self-forgiving, and know that I am doing the best I can at all times. No one can love me or take care of me the way that I can. And I know that I can heal my trauma and reparent my inner selves.

I know all of this, and I still forget, like all the time. As soon as we come earthside, we slowly start to forget. We come into this world and experience trauma, and trauma leads to that disconnect from Source. What we are seeing now, what we've seen through history: genocide, transphobia, and xenophobia; it is disconnection. The inability to see the Humanity and the Divinity in each other.

But thankfully, the opposite is also true. Like right now, I CAN SEE the Divinity in all of you. I am remembering for all of us, right now. So we are going to smudge it out. This smudge is medicine, we are medicine, we are good, and we are sacred.

So I ask you, can you blow on your embers? Blow on that fire inside of you, make that smoke come, cleanse yourself with that smoke, bless yourself with that smoke.

Remember, Remember, YOU ARE SACRED.

Ashe. Ajo. Padiush.

