
Tragic Bitches: Queer Xican@ Performance Acts against Oblivion

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People, listen to what your jotería is saying.
-Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*

In the introduction to *Ambientes: New Queer Latino Writing*, Lázaro Lima argues that “Queer Latino writing, understood as such, functions as narrative acts against oblivion” (8), adequately signaling the resistant and dissenting character that queer Latin@ writing embodies. The act of writing by the queer person of color exemplifies the sociopolitical activism in which the pen and performance become weapons to redefine “gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, economics, and political inclusion” (8). To this end, queer Xican@ artists Adelina Anthony, Dino Foxx, Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s *Tragic Bitches: An Experiment in Queer Xicana & Xicano Performance Poetry* (2013) seeks to recover a lost voice, that of the queer Xican@, among current Chicana@ sociocultural trends.¹ This paper will analyze the use of performance poetry as a tool for decolonizing queer Xicanidad, in and outside of the mainstream Chicano community. Through their sociopolitical activism, Anthony, Foxx, and Herrera y Lozano establish a queer people of color social demonstration given life through live performance poetry and the written page, highlighting the translatability of their work across different media. Brazen and unapologetic, *Tragic Bitches* serves as a social movement in and of itself in which these poets rescue queer Xicanidad from oblivion. They recognize and claim their collective tragedy while learning and healing from it.

When I Grow Up I Want to Poeticize la Jotería

A central theme of *Tragic Bitches* is that of healing the soul by living openly as queer Xican@s who are true to themselves and who, by breaking their painful silence, allow more varied depictions of Xicanidad to enter the conversation. Thus, the queer body of color is rescued from oblivion and liberated. The soul, likewise, undergoes a similar growth process in which it is healed from its previously painful condition. The outcome is simple because the process permits one to feel more comfortable in his or her own skin as equality in the national landscape becomes increasingly accessible for the LGBTQ community (Lima 9). This new knowledge will bring us closer to a feasible sociocultural change through its debunking of

heterogeneous and heteronormative stereotypes of Xicanidad.

While the collective performance of Anthony, Foxx, and Herrera y Lozano transmits the message of laying oneself bare before the audience, of being open—the only way to be in accordance with their performance experiment—perhaps no poem makes such a call for the future of *la jotería* as Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s “Childhood Dreams,” where the poet declares his disavowal of labels imposed by the oppressors.² He declares:

‘cuz my land may be occupied
and my body may be invaded
and I may only speak European languages
but I decide what I call myself. (25)

Herrera y Lozano tells how, when he grows up, he does not want to be just another “Hispanic,” but rather an individual true to himself: a Mexican American, queer, Xicano, activist poet. Hence, the poet tells us who he is and longs to be instead of letting the colonizer decide his identity, marking him as “Other.” Though hegemonic American society paints Herrera y Lozano as an “outsider,” by stressing his Xicano identity, he avers his indigeneity to this land and rejects the colonizers language and identity markers. He does not label himself “Mexican” (claiming Mexico as his nationality and potentially being mistaken for an immigrant), “Latino,” or “Hispanic” (being lumped together with other groups and losing his specific individual identity).

By performing their queer Xicanidad, the poets offer alternative routes to developing resistance within oppressive systems and structures, calling attention to Lázaro Lima’s notion that queer Latin@ aesthetics not only offers resistance, but also (re)imagines, (re)constructs, (re)members, and (re)envisions an original, unconventional branch of nationalism that more approximately resembles queer of color identity and experience (8). Herrera y Lozano reaffirms this concept of appropriating his queer identity, becoming the queerest of all:

when I grow up
I wanna be queer
I wanna be so damn queer
that even the queer think I’m queer. (26)

Therefore, the act of portraying queer desire conceptualizes subjectivity “through both semiotic structure (discursive spaces) and agency (identity practices) by investigating the way these fields work to constitute, inform, and transform one another” (Rodríguez 5). *Tragic Bitches* presents stage and performance poetry as discursive spaces capable of hosting an experiment: theorizing the specificities and

possibilities for queer Xican@ actuality. The poets' shared performance, essentially a performative identity practice, functions as their weapon against anonymity, breaking the previously protecting silence, i.e., oblivion.

Lázaro Lima argues that queer identity practices “provide alternative social imaginaries and templates from which to envision forms of national inclusion that establish greater continuity between the past, the present, and the futures of queer Latino communities and aesthetics” (10). Similarly, in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz posits that queer performance holds the keys for bettering social relations and further mutual understanding: “Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (1). Additionally, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick declares that the queers of color can use their queerness as a tool to perform a new kind of justice at the intersections of language, skin, migration, and state (*Tendencies* 9). To this end, Herrera y Lozano does more than simply state who he wishes to become, but inscribes himself into a discursive space that allows him to reclaim his past, present, and future. He declares that his identity practice serves a specific purpose:

when I grow up
.....
I wanna fight for liberation
for true liberation
.....
I wanna fight against the real issues
the core of our oppressions
.....
cuando yo sea grande
quiero ser poeta. (28)

Herrera y Lozano, by claiming his place in the world as a poet, casts light on a central tenet of *Tragic Bitches*: poetry and performance work in unison to resist oppression, and theorize alternative discourses and spaces for the queer Xican@ to occupy in order to survive and persevere. The performance stage functions as a place of sociocultural dissent and resistance where the poets bare their souls, wrestling with memory and identity to profess the future of queer Xicanidad, an act to which the audience must bear witness.

Exotic Queers, Heteroflexibility, and Xican@ Sensibility

While many of the poems in *Tragic Bitches* confront the closet and all of the associations that go with being in and out of the metaphorical space, perhaps none touch on the potential problematic nature of said sphere better than Dino Foxx's

“Exotic” and “Hollow” and Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s “Obesas Vueltas de la Vida.” According to these poets, being in the closet, essentially a form of personal oblivion, is equivalent to being invisible and unhappy or, as queer Chicano writer Michael Nava calls it, being in a “spiritual coffin.” Foxx tells about a boy with whom he once was in love, an experience that ultimately led to hurt because of his lover’s perceived sexual preferences and his worries about socially acceptable behavior. Foxx explains:

See, he was in love with a girl.
I fell in love with a straight boy.
A heterosexual, better called ‘heteroflexible.’ (13)

Foxx’s labelling of his lover’s sexuality as “heteroflexible” highlights the core belief in Chican@ culture that performing homosexual acts does not make one homosexual, drawing attention to Tomás Almaguer’s landmark study on queer Chican@ sexualities: “Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior.” Utilizing the theory of Cherríe Moraga as a point of departure in an investigation of the Chicano family,³ Almaguer explains how heterosexuality exists on a stronger level, given that Chican@s are a marginalized group in this country in social and class terms, i.e., the family offers a way of resisting the dominant culture. Almaguer contends:

Chicanos have never occupied the social space where a gay or lesbian identity can readily become a primary basis of self-identity. This is due, in part, to their structural position at the subordinate ends of both the class and racial hierarchies and in a context where ethnicity remains a primary basis of group identity and survival. (264)

Therefore, instead of conforming to Anglo culture’s definitions of heterosexuality and homosexuality, Chican@s follow the Mexican system that is based on being between passive and active (*pasivo* and *activo*) (257). In this sense, the homosexual Chicano can maintain his activity and, consequently, be accepted—at least tolerated—in Chican@ society. In “Hollow,” Foxx, perhaps speaking of the same man as seen in “Exotic,” highlights the dichotomy between active and passive sexuality when he compares himself to his lover’s girlfriend:

You can hear cum splattering
Onto the walls of my stomach
As I swallowed the ‘love’ of the
First straight man I ever scored
And the sounds of wasted, sacred
Life coating my rectum because

If he wanted to use a condom, he'd
Sleep with his girlfriend. (60)

His lover's heteroflexibility allows him to maintain his heterosexuality while participating in homosexual acts. In this scenario, it is Foxx who is the passive partner, performing oral sex and receiving anal sex, thereby taking on a homosexual identity in the Chicano system of sexuality. Similarly, Herrera y Lozano seems to suggest that this scenario is not unique to Foxx. In "Obesas Vueltas de la Vida," Herrera y Lozano writes:

después de una larga espera
renunciaste a tu amor por mí
uniéndote a una ella
lavándote lo que dejé en ti. (65)

In light of Almaguer's theory on Chican@ sexuality, the seemingly homosexual, or at least bisexual, men of Foxx's "Exotic" and "Hollow" and Herrera y Lozano's "Obesas Vueltas de la Vida" can retain their heterosexuality so long as they are the active ones and are perceived to be heterosexual based on their performance. Foxx's "You Never Change" also incorporates the same overarching theme of the closet and heteroflexibility.

Moreover, as Almaguer implies, Moraga notes that "lesbianism, in any form, and male homosexuality which openly avows both the sexual and the emotional elements of the bond, challenge the very foundation of la familia" (266). Homosexual men, therefore, are considerably privileged because they can maintain the nuclear family unit as long as they remain active and, in a certain sense, masculine while the lesbian suffers more marginalization. Almaguer, seeking solidarity and mutual understanding between gays and lesbians, offers us a theoretical framework that represents this intersectionality, as it challenges the false universal view that homosexuality is monolithic. On the other hand, he makes an appeal for a coalition between the two groups without depending on homogeneity, a call met by the three poets in question who have met his demand and produced their collaborative performance piece of queer Xicanidad.

Essentially, by maintaining one's active sexuality, heteroflexibility, and straight-acting image, one remains in the closet, certainly to an extent. Foxx writes in "Exotic":

Don't expect me to come running to the phone
When you decide to call and don't expect me to
Shove my tongue down your throat
When you've finally had enough to drink. (14)

Only after becoming inebriated is his lover able to perform homosexual acts with Foxx, emphasizing the marginalized view of non-hetero sexuality that mainstream society holds. Consequently, his lover remains heterosexual while adhering to an active sexuality in line with traditional heterosexual male behavior in which he exists as the penetrator and not the penetrated. This experience, as theorized throughout the performance piece, leads to more pain due to its disassociation with the body. As long as one continues to be closeted, one negates true identity, thus leading to further tragedy. In “Exotic,” Dino Foxx poeticizes the suffocating nature of the closet:

The view from inside the closet must be getting old.
I'm surprised the walls haven't started to
Close in on you yet.
Kindly be a dear and hand me my coat,
It's time for me to go out. (13)

To this end, Foxx establishes that, inasmuch as a person remains in the closet, concealed from society, he or she will never become a pure individual capable of learning how to live life or how to love it. This experience, coincidentally, serves as a learning one. Foxx writes in “Exotic”:

Finally come out and stop pretending.
It would be as if you were born again and
I don't have time to teach someone how
To live their life when I don't exactly know
How to live my own. (14)

Leaving the closet functions as a liberating queer rite of passage in which the individual is able to experience the world possibly for the first time. Likewise, Foxx's performance *comadre*, Adelina Anthony, conflates authenticity and individuality with coming-out:

An “authentic” Xicana for me is someone living their truths in line with progressive politics and spiritual practices. It's not about falling into essentializing practices, but putting the espoused political and spiritual tenets to task. Coming out shapes everyone differently, especially because of how their loved ones or friends react to the news, but, ultimately, it is a freeing act. (“Tragic Bitches Commentary”)

She maintains that coming-out functions are the most necessary step to living an authentic life, one that embodies the multiplicity of truths as well as complete and complex identities and experiences.

Tragic Bitches' repetitive focus on the closet draws attention to the groundbreaking

work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Epistemology of the Closet,” where she proposes that the closet has been a basic tenet of homosexual life and experience in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. With this in mind, Sedgwick argues that the closet is “the defining structure for gay oppression this century” and often, the person is unaware of the closet (“Epistemology” 48). *Tragic Bitches* frequently refers to the oppressive characteristic of the closet while highlighting how the out queer becomes exoticized. For example, by remaining in the closet, Foxx’s lover actively participates in exoticizing his queer Chican@ fantasy, creating a fantasy of dominating the queer body of color. Foxx writes:

I don’t wanna be your exotic, homoerotic,

Man-whore, boy toy fantasy.

.....

I deserve someone who doesn’t

Turn me on and off like a light switch.

Don’t want to be your exotic. (13)

Thus, Foxx becomes the exoticized “Other” to his seemingly Anglo “frat boy, truck driving, faded t-shirt wearing, low rise Levi jeans sportin’, straight porn watching” lover (13). In his adherence to culturally mandated gender stereotypes along with continuing his active sexuality, Foxx’s lover is able to retain his heterosexuality and masculinity regardless of his heteroflexible orientation. By frequently poeticizing and performing the oppressive character of the closet, *Tragic Bitches* emphasizes the necessity of removing the queer body and mind from such a place in order to heal and claim oneself from a previous state of invisibility.

When Ken would grind the camouflage off G.I. Joe’s ass: The Gender Trouble of Feeling Brown

Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s *bildungsroman*esque “Hairpsray & Fideo” reinforces the notion that gender is a social construct, an idea that Judith Butler notably plants in her landmark work *Gender Trouble*. Herrera y Lozano presents multiple images of his adolescence through which he manifests the importance that gender roles play in a traditional community, e.g., the Mexican one. The poet ultimately suggests, as Butler, that gender roles are social creations that do not adequately reflect reality. Furthermore, being a queer person of color, he, along with Anthony and Foxx, exists in a situation of double jeopardy, one of being brown and queer, double marginalized in mainstream society. Only by means of coming to terms with his true queer identity is Herrera y Lozano capable of finding solidarity with his fellow brown performance jot@s as he escapes his feelings of inadequacy.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler examines the concepts of sex and gender and how society and politics affect and are related to the construction of identity and gender.

Butler argues that “gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (3). Essentially, Butler reveals that the individual possesses the liberty to create his or her own identity as well as gender. In *Tragic Bitches*, Herrera y Lozano shows the censorship of identity and gender in the Chicano community and the confusion this reality created in his childhood. The poet discusses how his younger years are associated with the smell of hairspray, a province typically identified with women:

growing up
the only smell I held dearer
than ‘Macita’s burnt fideo
was the smell of Aqua-Net. (45)

He goes on to explain his memories associated with Aqua-Net and how these marked his experience and identity growing up in a Chicano household. From an early age, Herrera y Lozano was aware of socio-culturally appropriate gender behavior. Because the gender guidelines of his surroundings, young Herrera y Lozano consciously performed the “correct” male gender with the goal of not drawing attention to his true desires and their transgressive qualities of which, he suggests, he was aware early on: “yeah, those were the days / when Ken would grind the camouflage off G.I. Joe’s ass / while my cousins weren’t looking (45).”

These examples of conforming to gender stereotypes highlight Butler’s theory that each part of one’s identity, including gender and sex, is part of a larger matrix of sociopolitical control. Therefore, true sexual identity becomes an illusion as it is proposed by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality Volume I*. Foucault theorizes that sex does not function as a solution to the oppressive power system; it is instead an essential part of it (5).

Moreover, Herrera y Lozano compares the experience of constructing gender for the purpose of passing as a heterosexual boy to being in the closet. Only after coming to terms with his true identity is he able to be liberated and free. The poet writes:

and I became a full-blown queen—convinced
that camouflage is no longer sexy
and that Herbal Essence hairspray
does not have the same healing powers as Aqua-Net. (47)

Hiding one’s identity is likened to being camouflaged, or closeted in other terms, effectively demonstrating that from an early age, Herrera y Lozano realized that his true identity was not socially acceptable. This gender vigilance draws attention

to Adrienne Rich's much-anthologized essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" where she sustains the notion that the heterosexual system erases homosexual existence due to heteronormative oppression and, similar to Butler's logic, rigid definitions of gender (227). Although Rich is primarily concerned with lesbianism, her notion of compulsory heterosexuality offers insight into the plight of gay men as well. Compulsory heterosexuality limits homosexual identity and experience by reaffirming the power that heterosexual systems and structures hold. This governance of human sexuality illustrates the juridico-discursive power that Foucault analyzes. Sexuality is defined as something that power has to repress and control. The juridico power does not produce what it declares to represent; the process itself of trying to establish a category of representing women is problematic (Foucault 82-83). According to Butler, for example, there is no common identity that covers the term "woman" because the term is not exhaustive. Gender, whether male or female, is not monolithic; it is not always constructed coherently and consistently or in distinct contexts. Gender intersects with class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, etc. and therefore "becomes impossible to separate out 'gender' from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 4-5). One cannot separate gender from other parts of one's identity. Notably, Herrera y Lozano tells us that being hidden is not healthy, and that true self-liberation cannot be achieved until the individual lives free of falseness.

Herrera y Lozano's difficulty adhering to prescribed gender roles coincides with his realization that being brown, not to mention queer, poses a problem in the greater scheme of American culture, calling attention to José Esteban Muñoz's notion of "Feeling Brown," or feeling like a problem. Muñoz establishes that "Feeling Brown" is feeling together in difference. "Feeling Brown" is an 'apartness together' through sharing the status of being a problem" (444). To this end, "Feeling Brown" serves as the central entity that binds minority group identifications; in this case the three poets are linked together in their performance piece by means of accepting their difference(s) from mainstream society and using these dissimilarities as tools to devise various forms of oppositional consciousness. Herrera y Lozano explains:

our brown growing pains
didn't happen overnight
they happened all the time
they happened when we learned that tíos
going to college meant they were going to prison
.....

maybe the tíos in college had a point
things aren't easy for us
maybe the reason Ms. Nelson treated me like shit
in her second grade class was because
I didn't belong there
or did I? (46)

He not only highlights the difficulty of growing up homosexual, but also of growing up brown in a society that continuously marginalizes people of color. Poorly treated systematically, he questioned his legitimacy, self-worth, and potential. It was not until he dropped his mask and bared his soul that he was able to access the healing powers of becoming a “full-blown queen” (47). His “Hairspray & Fideo” shows the difficulty of growing up homosexual in Chicano society, a community that represses and controls transgressive sexuality by means of erasing it. Herrera y Lozano poeticizes his experiences of perpetual conformity and vigilance of his gender as a child, hinting at the frustration of having to perform the socially acceptable gender regardless of his natural likes and intuitions. The piece points to Judith Butler’s principal goal of demystifying gender and sex; these should not be considered rigid categories with specific characteristics, but rather entities and parts of identity that are constantly being performed.

Jot@s Do It Better, *the way we were meant to*

An integral part of *Tragic Bitches* is the recovering of queer sexualities by placing them in a public performance space. Thus, the three poets theorize about their sexuality and sexual experience as they require other bodies, heterosexual and homosexual, to bear witness to their performance. This performance as Foucaultian confession⁶ utilizes a public space to confess previously confined and relegated alternative sexualities. The poets must confess to be free and to having found self-acceptance despite society’s governance of queer sexuality (Foucault 18-21). Foucault posits that the central tenet behind the Catholic Church’s use of confession is to monitor and repress sexuality. He sustains: “The forbidding of certain words, the decency of expressions, all the censorings of vocabulary, might well have been only secondary devices compared to that great subjugation: ways of rendering it morally acceptable and technically useful” (21). Through forcing individuals to confess their sex and sexuality, the Church is able to become aware and censor thoughts or actions it deems inappropriate.

The process of having to confess one’s queerness calls attention to the oppressive regulations of a society that requires its members to be heterosexual as maintained by Adrienne Rich in “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.” Rich reinforces the notion that it is necessary to break away from the heterosexual system.

She suggests that lesbianism has been erased from feminist studies on account of heteronormative oppression and, as Judith Butler stipulates in *Gender Trouble*, by monolithic definitions of gender (227). According to Rich, it is necessary to establish a bridge, one similar to Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga's proposal in *This Bridge Called My Back*, between the interstices of lesbianism and feminism; only by means of this coalition will an effective fight against authoritative powers become a reality. She in addition reinforces the view that social relations between the sexes are problematic and have left lesbians invalidated (Rich 229). As a remedy, she suggests that heterosexuality be reorganized and studied as a political institution that is heteronormative, privileges men, and empowers them (Rich 233). Rich sustains that lesbians do not have a political existence because their sexuality has been seen as a female version of male homosexuality—this grouping of both types of homosexuality, in effect, negates lesbian identity and experience.

Cherríe Moraga has equated lesbianism with poverty, due to the predominance of heteronormative systems and structures in society (*Loving in the War Years* 52-53). Similarly, in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa refers often to the difficulty she faced on account of her queer sexuality: "Nothing in my culture approved of me. *Había agarrado malos pasos*. Something was 'wrong' with me. *Estaba más allá de la tradición*" (16). Chicano culture demands that women comply more than men with sociocultural values. As previously noted, seemingly homosexual Chicano men can retain their public heterosexual appearance as long as they maintain an active sexuality; lesbians do not have this privilege because of their rupturing of the Chicano nuclear family unit. Ultimately, sexuality functions as the epicenter of the rejection of Chicano culture and serves as the basis of poverty and marginality. Anzaldúa reaffirms: "For the lesbian of color, the ultimate rebellion she can make against her native culture is through her sexual behavior. She goes against two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality" (19). Lesbian sexuality, like gay sexuality, is marginalized and considered a deviation from the norms of the dominant society. According to Gayle Rubin in "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," sex and sexuality have been utilized as political agents to implement repression and dominance in contemporary Western society. Homosexuality is thus marginalized and considered a deviation in mainstream society since it belongs to the "outer limits" of the sexual values system, which consists of all sex forms and sexuality that represent bad, abnormal, and unnatural sex within the heteronormative systems. Rubin sustains that the outer limits, according to the dominant discourse, defines bad sex as "homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, or commercial" (14).

Tragic Bitches, nonetheless, desires to openly discuss a diversity of queer

sexualities as well as to honor and celebrate their queer Xicanidad. Adelina Anthony's "Santa Panocha" follows similar themes to her performance triptych *Las Hociconas: Three Locas with Big Mouths and Even Bigger Brains* (2013) in which she utilizes the lesbian body as the site where her queer politics originate. Simply put, in *Las Hociconas*, Anthony tells us that lesbians do sex better:

I mean, for the beautiful queer life of me, I cannot comprehend homophobic males: "What the fuck's a dyke gonna do better than me?" (She holds up a finger.) Raise a family. (Another finger.) Pay the bills on time. (Lowers fingers to pleasure a womyn.) Oh, and here's a novel idea, I can give her an orgasm, again and again and again and again and again . . . again. (Almost orgasm herself.) Yes, that's pretty much what we dykes do better than men. (38)

While society tries to impose a heteronormative narrative on the queer body, Anthony shows that lesbians are perfectly content without male sexuality penetrating their bedrooms (and bodies). "Santa Panocha" parallels queer lesbian sexual experience with that of a religious practice, taking on a spiritual aspect that transcends corporality. Effectively, the poem invokes a lesbian who must make herself holy, more so after the religious world and a lover have debased her heart ("Tragic Bitches Commentary"). Anthony's bedroom becomes a religious sanctuary where the *panocha* is the sacrament that leads to finding God, an otherworldly experience:

When the followers come on their knees
hungry for salvation, I dutifully part my lips.
In this act of self-redemption . . . *Here's my body.*
They greedily swallow a small wafer already
melted down to a milky pearl & follow this
with sanguine kisses, blessed & stain-worthy,
because the sheets we used to make love on
have been burnt by a new lover's urgency. (21)

Anthony (re)claims and (re)appropriates the queer body as a cathedral of worship where each distinct part of her serves an individual purpose to induce belief in a higher power. However, this freshly pronounced queer spirituality does not look to a heavenly being so much as to the queer body:

With ardent thumbs & forefingers,
like a rosary, womyn rub my nipples.
Instantly—I become church choir
Alleluia! Praise be the Mujeres! (22)

"Santa Panocha" reiterates the importance of discovering queer sexualities.

Heteronormative systems and structures, e.g., the Catholic Church, have routinely sought to erase homosexual identity and existence, imposing heterosexual models on queer people of color. By claiming the *panocha* as a sacred site, Anthony succeeds in bringing “the sexual-sacred to the forefront as a connected and radical act of reclamation” (“Tragic Bitches Commentary”). Therefore, Anthony’s conflating of lesbian sexuality with religion serves a higher purpose. She claims the bedroom as the ideal site of spirituality, and the body as the holy sacrament that will ultimately lead to an existential, otherworldly religious experience. Simply put, lesbians do sex better.

Likewise, Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s “You Bring Out the Joto in Me”—paying homage to and rewriting Sandra Cisneros’s “You Bring Out the Mexican in Me”—is equally as prophetic in its assertion of a genuine queer sexual identity. Whereas Anthony tells us that queers do sex better, Herrera y Lozano explains that the way *jot@s* do it is how it was meant to be done. The poet is therefore unapologetic in his candid portrayal of the intricacies and legitimacy of queer sexualities. Herrera y Lozano professes:

you bring out the Joto in me
.....
you bring out the drag queen in me
the perpetual attitude in me
.....
the gay bar bathroom bump in me
the *Bidi-Bidi-Bom-Bom* in me
the San Antonio 3:00 a.m. fideo con carne in me
the fondling on the dance floor in me.
.....
I want to show you the way jotos do it
the way we were meant to. (7-9)

Herrera y Lozano’s proclamation of queer *jotería* falls in line with Anthony’s “Santa Panocha” in which embracing queer sexualities is the only method of inserting oneself into the dominant socio-historical narrative. By remaining in the closet and hidden, the queer Xican@ continues to live on the margins of society, unseen and unknown.

The work of *Tragic Bitches* is to unmask the sexual fluidity that is queer sexuality. Similarly, Dino Foxx’s “Broken Spanish” exposes the central dogma of the performance piece by utilizing the realities of being Xican@ and living in the linguistic borderlands, in a constant fluctuation not only between Spanish and English, but also between disparate sociocultural registers:

I will speak to you in every Spanish
Accent I've ever heard. Go from
"Órale chulo, bésame bien fuerte" to
"O sea, ay güey, ¡no mames!" to
"Coño, carajo, come to papi, lemme
See dat cum." "¡Sas culera!"
I will fuck you in broken Spanish
In the only way I know how. (24)

In other words, there is no monolithic concept of queer identity, experience, and sexuality. Anthony, Foxx, and Herrera y Lozano repeatedly demonstrate that they cannot be confined to rigid definitions of how, who, or what a queer Xican@ should be. Queer Xicanidad is marked by fluidity and only through embracing the contradictions and inconsistencies can a genuine persona be developed. Yes, jot@s do it better because they are genuine; this is how it was meant to be.

Conclusion: Releasing Queer Xicanidad

In a final act of queer performativity, Anthony, Foxx, and Herrera y Lozano unite to give queer Xican@s sensibility, effectively putting the finishing touches on a new interpretation of what may be called a *Queer Story*, a phenomenology of what it means to be queer and brown in the twenty-first century. By creating their own family of jot@s, the poets provide the means to grow and heal, thus establishing an improved society marked by inclusivity. Emanuel Xavier stresses the importance for the queer community to unify in and around their diversity, to build a bridge to an inextricably better world. He writes "The queer population is made up of our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles, sons and daughters. In the end, we are all part of the same struggle. There is enough prejudice and hatred in the world for us to take one another for granted as *familia*" (11). Furthermore, Cherríe Moraga reiterates the importance of the queer family by arguing that because lesbians and gay men have been forced out their blood families, they are in a critical position to address necessary changes within the Chican@ Nation ("Queer Aztlán" 232).

The poetic performance experiment ends with "Releasing the X," notably the only piece performed by all three artists. In this poem, autonomy, individuality, subjectivity, and entrance into mainstream discursive spaces are given to their fellow queer Xican@s. The humanizing and granting of subjectivity to the queer person of color serves as a powerful action in which, according to Cherríe Moraga, "the pieces of ourselves broken by racist and colonial incursions are re-collected and reconfigured through and art of social transformation" (*Xicana Codex* 39). Collectively, the poets of *Tragic Bitches* give back a name to queer people of color

and, thus, autonomy. No longer are queer Xican@s the “pinche, arrastrado, canalla, aborrecido, fucker,” the “hija de la chingada, puta, pendeja, mentirosa, desgraciada,” or the “punk, asshole, closeted, mother fucker” (78). Instead of these pejorative terms, the performers call them “Juan,” “Carolina,” and “Mocha,” hence granting them sovereignty (78).

To this end, the entirety of *Tragic Bitches: An Experiment in Queer Xicana & Xicano Performance Poetry* comes together to form a queer Xican@ discourse that gives life through staged performance, reaffirming the notion proposed by Cherríe Moraga of the importance of the body and performance to generate sociopolitical activism:

Experience first generated through the body returns to the body in the flesh of the staged performance. In this sense, for me, it is as close to direct political activism as I can get as an artist, for theater requires the body to make testimony and requires other bodies to bear witness to it. (*Xicana Codex* 34-5)

Adelina Anthony, Dino Foxx, and Lorenzo Herrera y Lozano’s performance poetry serves as an experiment in (re)visioning and (re)appropriating dominant narratives, discourses, spaces around race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. Their recovery, and the celebration of queer Xicanidad, forges a sociopolitical space, in performance, where queer Xican@ bodies become the locus where alternative identities can be reclaimed from their previously fateful condition and thus rescued from oblivion.

Notes

¹ The terms “Xican@” and “Chican@” will be used to refer to both men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, and all in between. “Chicano” will be used when referring only to mainstream heteronormative Chicano society and men. Moreover, since the three performers self-identify as “Xican@,” “Xicano” and “Xicana,” these terms will be used when referring to them individually and their performance poetry. Because the poets identify themselves collectively as “Xican@s,” thereby connecting with their indigenous roots and rejecting the colonizer’s language, this term will be used when referring to the group.

² Several of the poems analyzed in this paper come from the poets’ earlier works: “Broken Spanish” first appeared in *Mariposas: A Modern Anthology of Queer Latino Poetry* (Floriscanto Press, 2008); “Exotic” and “Childhood Dreams” first appeared in *Queer Codex: Chile Love (allgo/Evelyn Street Press, 2008)*; “Hairspray & Fideo” and “Releasing the X” first appeared in *Santo de la Pata Alzada: Poems from the Queer/Xicano/Positive Pen* (Mujeres de Maíz, 2006).

³ Almaguer reaffirms the importance of separating lesbianism from male homosexuality in his analysis of homosexual experience and identity in the United States. Nevertheless, an examination of the intersections and disagreements between the two forms of homosexuality holds value.

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