

Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Greater Southwest

Volume 1
Issue 1 *Identity, Culture, and Art in New Mexico*

Article 29

2021

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Recommended Citation

Ramos Villagra, Maria Jose. "Those Streets that I Dare to Call my Barrio." *Chamisa: A Journal of Literary, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Greater Southwest* 1, 1 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/chamisa/vol1/iss1/29>

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Those Streets that I Dare to Call my *Barrio*

by María José Ramos Villagra

I am flying.

Riding, actually. On my bike. Feeling the air on my head, the combination of cold air and hot summer breeze as the Spring melts into Summer. I pass backyard garage sales. Forgotten toys, clothes that hung on firm curves two babies ago, furniture sagging between worn-in and worn-out – just like us.

Running in the rain reminds me of home, the smell of *tierra mojada*, wet dirt, soft roads, intimidating sounds of a tree standing proudly against fierce winds. My grandmother taught me that, she never liked to be called grandma, she made us call her “*Tita*.” Memories can be preserved, pickled, to bring back and taste again, and again...and again. Just like when my *Tita* would pickle her herbs and yell at me whenever she found me smelling her *palo santo* and *hierba buena*. That is how I realized that I am a digger. I am always digging for memories to pickle, to taste again, to pretend that there isn't just one place I still call home when I forget to catch myself.

They say necessity is the mother of creativity. That's one relentless mother. These blocks call out to Mother with their plasma centers, pawn shops, dollar stores, payday loan stores, and garage sales on every other home. Mother watches as we rent out our bodies, our minds, ourselves. Necessity is the mother of creativity and informal economies.

It is a blessing and a curse to walk through the world with our skin in different places. Seeking many languages. Community is the seed I plant and intend to visit, once in a while, to water, to trim, to pick the fruits, to heal.

To be healed.

María José Ramos Villagra is a community organizer interested in desire, levels of deepness, and belonging. For fun, Villagra gardens, rides her bike, attends art shows, and hangs out with friends. For money, she works as a mortgage banker for Homewise, a local mortgage, real estate, and financial counseling non-profit. For more about her, you can visit her website: <http://mariacotecucha.wixsite.com/maria-jose-ramos>