

REIMAGINING LA LLORONA: Looking into the Border Crisis

Pico del Hierro-Villa

Oral stories are used to teach children about, what some may call, mythical creatures, sightings, creations of life on earth and valuable lessons. For the story of La Llorona, she was an example of a tragedy who teaches us to never disobey our mothers and why we couldn't be out so late playing in the streets. As many of us feministxs who grew up with her became older, some decided to recreate her story. La Llorona has been interpreted into different entities and meanings. Our outlet to our art and creations has been inspired by the women who have been victimized. We were tired of hearing stories where women became saints, lifeless bodies, or an item. The legend of La Llorona allows oncoming generations to mold the story of pain and compare it to modern reality. Her story has been reclaimed by Chicana feminists and queer Chicanxs being turned into art, songs, and creative writings. Our stories of the woman tied down by her children, husband and more have been warped into social issues women are facing and fighting against in the present day. The radical conceptualization of occupying forces amongst marginalized bodies is something Chicana/Chicanx art and writing has allowed us to find our freedom in.

Growing up half a mile away from the Río Bravo/Río Grande border, La Llorona was a *mujer* who was a threat to the lower valley area. The tale I remember was from *mi mama*, she told me she was a mother who went insane and drowned both her *niños* and every night you could hear her weeping and see her walking down the river. If you don't behave, she would come and get you.



“Si no te portas bien La Llorona te va a venir a buscar.” I believed this tale to be true, especially since my tías and tíos would tell me my mom used to see her dead abuela sitting in the hallway watching our family. The sighting of a spirit or entity wasn’t ever something that was labeled as mythical or as folklore, so I took La Llorona very seriously. Every night when I was outside trying to see her from my front yard, I would see the field lights turn on at the border and would see Border Patrol cars parked nearby. Border Patrol was no stranger to our neighborhood or my childhood. Every day they would patrol the neighborhood and on bad days they would try to intrude in the privacy of your own home. The home I lived in was my abuela’s and that’s where my mom, my brother and I stayed. Once in a while, my abuela, who passed away when I was sixteen, would hide families who just crossed the border in her house and as mad as others got, she said she could never let her people suffer and be taken away. The presence of Border Patrol agents and the violent stories I would hear

happen at the border always made me wonder, if they are occupying our area all day and all night, they should have seen La Llorona by now, que no? Were they ordered to just ignore her or drive miles away from the Río for the hours she was present so nothing bad would happen? Was La Llorona a woman who mourned more than her children? Was she crying for more than the river she drowned her children in?

As I grew older and the border crisis and violence in the two sister cities began to wreak havoc, I began to make the connections. The spirit of La Llorona did not live in the river but she lived in people who were victims. She lived in women, children, trans people, parents, and men. And who was causing all this weeping if it wasn't this woman? It was Border Patrol, trans-misogyny, U.S. intervention, colonization, and overall violence. The weeping was now heard all day and all night, and it came from the women in Mexico mourning all those lost from the femicides. It came from parents being torn away from their children to be put into internment camps. It came from the trans mujeres doing sex work near the crossing point into Mexico being murdered and wishing society would accept them one day. It came from people who "illegally" crossed the border who were found hiding in homes wondering if they could be caught. It came from deported mothers and fathers whose children didn't even know they were just deported because they were at school getting the education their parents wanted for them. And it came from me who grew up witnessing border violence and screaming as loud as I could because it was all I had left. La Llorona was no longer a story of a mother who mourned her sins and Border Patrol agents weren't the only ones who could see her, because I can see her when I walk out my door, I can see her in tents near downtown El Paso, I can see her on the news and I can see her in the mirror. The history of the crying woman by the river has been co-opted by the occupational violence in the U.S. and Latin America,

the U.S. nation-state has created the refugee crisis and split identities. They will not alleviate the conditions they have created. I believe hybridity, rather than abolishing a division only to create another one between people, is what can truly liberate and stop the painful sobbing. La Llorona is now the story and motivation of liberation.