

Acknowledgments

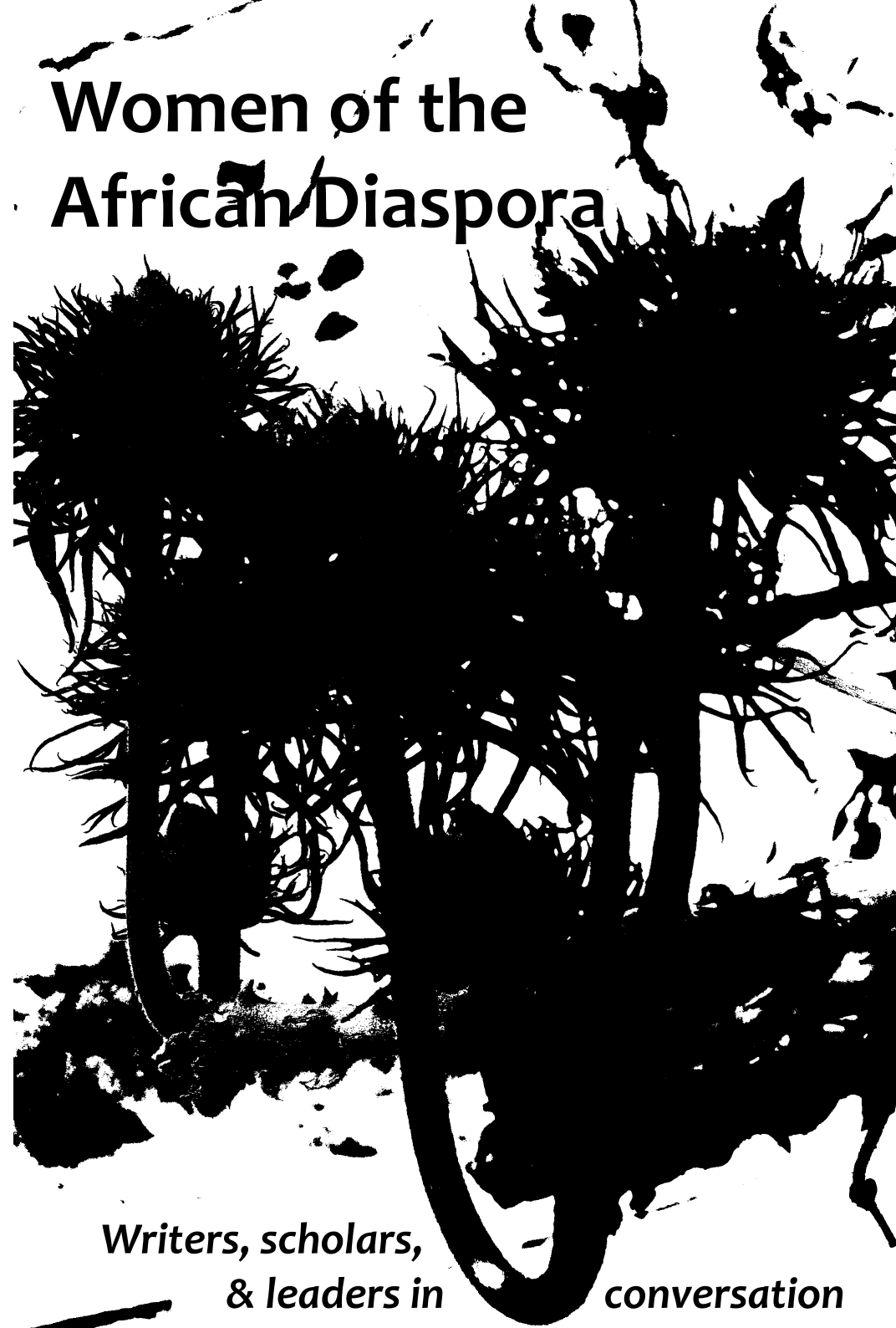
African American Studies
Black Student Union
College of Education
College of Liberal Arts
Department of Communication
Department of Creative Writing
Department of English
Department of History
Department of Languages and Linguistics
Department of Political Science
Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance
Humanities Texas
Institute of Oral History at UTEP
Inter-American Jewish Studies Program
Natural Gas Conference Center at UTEP
Student Government Association at UTEP
Sweet Earth Flying Press



HumanitiesTexas

This program was made possible in part with a grant from Humanities Texas, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Women of the African Diaspora



**Writers, scholars,
& leaders in conversation**



Setting the Stage

The Women of the African Diaspora conference arose from vibrant conversations in journals, at national and international conferences, and in our classrooms. As we participated in and generated discussions with writers, scholars, and leaders, we recognized the need for a forum that would bring academics, activists, artisans, and world-changers together. *Women of the African Diaspora: Writers, Scholars, and Leaders in Conversation* unites some of the

most dynamic thinkers we know. We hope that conversations commenced at The University of Texas at El Paso will resonate for years to come. We know that this meeting will connect colleagues who share common interests and goals. It will also shape our understandings of diasporic identity, experience, and politics. We invite you to test new ideas and time-worn boundaries throughout the conference. We hope you will feel free to engage, explore, and question notions of diasporic people, places, and productions. We thank you for contributing your best ideas to this important discussion. We dedicate this conference to the diasporic women who have influenced our thinking and changed our lives: Lisa Aubrey, Anna J. Cooper, Audre Lorde, Mary Carter Smith, and Harriet Tubman.

Maceo Dailey, Marion Rohrleitner,
Sarah Ryan, and Joyce Stahmer

tion, the Latin American Studies Association, and MELUS . She is an Assistant professor of English and an Adjunct professor of African American Studies at The University of Texas at El Paso.

Dr. Sarah E. Ryan studies peace-building in modern Rwanda. Ryan is the recipient of the Business Council for Peace VERA award for her role in designing BPeace's Afghanistan and Rwanda "Race to Innovation" programs. Her research group's most recent work was featured in the "15th Anniversary of the Rwandan Genocide" issue of *Peace Review*. Ryan holds a Ph.D. in Rhetorical Criticism, an M.A. in Interpersonal Communication, and a Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from Ohio University, as well as a B.A. in Organizational Communication from Capital University (Columbus, OH). She is an Assistant Professor in Communication, an Adjunct Professor in African American Studies, and an Affiliate Faculty member at the Kigali Institute of Education in Kigali, Rwanda. Ryan designed this program.



Joyce Stahmer's bio appears on page 9.

African American Studies at UTEP

The African American Studies Program provides a humanistic lens and course of study for individuals of all backgrounds to examine the African American experience and the attendant complexities of race relations in the American southwest, the state of Texas, the nation, and the diaspora. The program's curriculum centers on the African American experience as it relates primarily to past, present, and future issues of (1) economic and business development; (2) leadership and service; (3) changing family structures and values; (4) gender politics; (5) the rapidly changing world of science and technology; and the importance of these issues in the local and global consciousness and behavior of African Americans and others of African descent. Students explore these issues using interdisciplinary approaches and comparative methodologies to acquire the critical thinking skills and knowledge for leadership, involvement in community development, preparation for graduate school and to meet the personal and professional challenges of the 21st century.

Conference Organizers

Maceo Crenshaw Dailey, Jr., is Director of the African American Studies Program and Associate professor in the Department of History of the University of Texas at El Paso. He has served as a faculty member at Smith College, Boston College, Brown University, Howard University, Spelman College, and Morehouse College. He co-edited with Kristine Navarro, *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell: Oral Histories of African American Women of El Paso* and with Ruthe Winegarten, *Tuneful Tales* by Bernice Love Wiggins. Dailey has published in *Harvard Business History*, *Contributions in Black Studies*, *Sage*, and the *Atlanta History Journal*. His awards are numerous, including the Alex W. Bealer award for best scholarly essay in the *Atlanta History Journal*. He has been named to *Who's Who In America*, *Who's Who In The World*, and *Who's Who Among American Teachers*. Currently, he serves on the El Paso Art Museum Advisory Board and on the Board of Humanities Texas (the state arm of NEH), which he previously chaired for two terms. He is a past board member of the Child Crisis Center of El Paso, El Paso Symphony, and McCall Neighborhood Center. A recipient of a Kauffman Entrepreneurial Fellowship, Dailey researches the business history of El Paso and the larger American community.



Marion Rohrleitner holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Notre Dame and a Mag.phil. in American Studies and Romance Languages and Literatures from the Leopold-Franzens-Universität in Innsbruck, Austria. Her research interests concern the intersection of history, gender, and the creation of an “intimate public sphere” in contemporary Latina/o American and Afro-Caribbean literature. Her current book project is entitled *Hemispheric Bodies: Intimacy, Historical Fictions, and the Transnational Imaginary*. Her recent article “Looming Prairies and Blooming Orchids: The Politics of Sex and Race in Nelly Rosario’s *Song of the Water Saints*” was published in a special edition of *Antipodas: A Journal of Hispanic and Galician Studies* dedicated to trauma and the Trujillato in the Dominican Republic. Rohrleitner has presented papers at the annual conferences of the American Studies Associa-

Conference Schedule

Thursday April 15th , Natural Gas Conference Center
 6pm *Any Black Woman in the Postnatal House?*
Gendered Geographies of Home in the Diaspora
 Ayo Abietou Coly

Opening Reception and Book Signing

Friday April 16th , Natural Gas Conference Center

8:30am *Black is not art, Art is not black*
 (Breakfast) Olumide Popoola

9:30-10:30 *A freedom stolen*
 Yvette Christiansë, Kathy Staudt
 & Charles Ambler, Chair

10:45-11:45 *Keeping the story alive*
 Natasha Gordon-Chipembere &
 Joyce Stahmer

12:00-1:30pm *Framing the silence*
 (Lunch) Myriam J. A. Chancy

1:45-2:45 *Tales of love and survival*
 Ana-Maurine Lara & Cynthia Bejarano

3:00-4:00 *The poetics of justice*
 Angie Cruz, Selfa Chew, Sasha Pimental
 Chacón, & Meredith Abarca, Chair

4:30pm Closing Reception and Steel Drum
 Band Performance

Ayo Abietou Coly

Ayo A. Coly is an Assistant professor of Comparative Literature, African Studies, and Gender Studies at Dartmouth College. Coly's research areas include postcolonial and diasporic literatures, African gender politics, and postcolonial masculinities. She is the author of *Home Matters: Gender, Migration and the Claims of Postcolonial Nationhood in Francophone African Literatures* (forthcoming in 2010 from Lexington Books). She is a co-editor (with Ivy G. Wilson) of the 30th anniversary issue of *Callaloo* devoted to the Black diaspora. Her articles have appeared in *Research in African Literatures*, *The Canadian Journal of Comparative Literature*, and *Nottingham French Studies*. She is currently completing a book manuscript on postcolonial visual representations of the African female body. Coly holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Women's Studies from Pennsylvania State University.



One way to think about the Black Diaspora, or diasporas in general, is as a kind of cosmogram, as a system of points that constitute a constellation. When distinctions within the Black Diaspora are delineated, former colonial regimes are often understood as the common denominators that thread a given constituency such that, for example, Québec, Paris, and Fort-de-France or Lagos, London, and Kingston form a particular matrix. To be sure, these networks are precisely what might allow Haitians and Senegalese to converse through French rather than through some combination of Kreyòl, Pulaar, or Wolof. - Wilson & Coly, "Black is the Color of the Cosmos or *Callaloo* and The Cultures of the Diaspora Now," pp. 417-418

Conference Book Signings

The following books will be available for purchase and signing during the conference

Meredith Abarca. *Voices in the Kitchen...*

Cynthia Bejarano. *meXicana Encounters...*

Sasha Pimentel Chacon. *Insides She Swallowed*

Yvette Christiansë. *Unconfessed*

Yvette Christiansë. *Castaway*

Myriam Chancy. *Framing the Silence*

Myriam Chancy. *The Loneliness of Angels*

Angie Cruz. *Soledad*

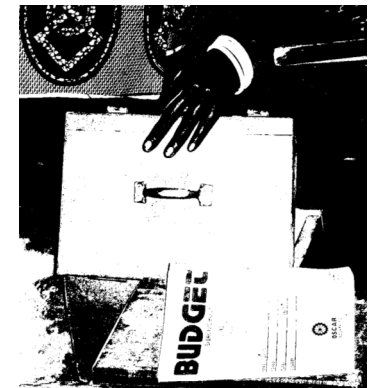
Angie Cruz. *Let it rain Coffee*

Ana-Maurine Lara. *Erzulie's Skirt*

Olumide Popoola et al., *Talking Home...*

Kathy Staudt. *Violence and Activism at the Border*

Kathy Staudt et al., *Human Rights Along the U.S.-Mexico Border...*



Panel Chairs



Charles Ambler is a Professor of History at the University of Texas at El Paso where he was formerly Dean of the Graduate School and Associate Vice President. He earned his PhD in African History from Yale University and has done research on eastern, central, southern, and West Africa. He is currently (2010) President of the African Studies Association.

He is the author of two books and numerous chapters, articles and reviews on various aspects of modern African history, including most recently film and media. He teaches classes on African, imperial, and United States history at the undergraduate and graduate levels. Ambler has been awarded major grants from the National Science Foundation, the Mellon Foundation, the Sloan Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has been a Mellon Faculty Fellow at Harvard University, a Research Associate at the Universities of London, Zambia and Nairobi, and a senior visiting member of the African Studies faculty at Oxford University. In 2009 he was a UTEP nominee for the University of Texas System outstanding teacher award.

Meredith E. Abarca is an Associate professor of English at the University of Texas at El Paso. She is the author of *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working-Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*. Some of her articles have appeared in *Food & Foodways*, one of the top international journals in the area of food studies. Her work has also been published in edited collections and encyclopedias. Her latest work focuses on “curanderismo” and foodways as means to develop analytical paradigms the move beyond identity politics. Her passion for stories, specifically those related to food, has allowed her to travel to Mexico, Poland, Scotland, Italy, Spain and Australia to lecture on this area of her scholarship.



Olumide Popoola

The London based Afro-German writer and poet Olumide Popoola has performed internationally in various settings like the Glastonbury Music Festival (UK), Afrikan History Week (Norway), at the Seagull Centre Calcutta (India) and the Southbank Literature Festival in London, to name a few. Increasingly also invited as a guest lecturer, she often collaborates with musicians or other artists. The scope of her work concerns critical investigation into the ‘in-between’ of culture, language and public space, where a sometimes uncomfortable look at complexity is needed. She is especially interested in cross-genre works which draw on theory in their conception or execution and the notion of vernacular or hybrid languages as literary opportunities for social and cultural spaces. To expand on these explorations, she is continuing her studies as a PhD student in Creative Writing in Fall 2010. Olumide holds a BSc in Ayurvedic Medicine and a MA in Creative Writing from the University of East London. Her work has appeared in anthologies, journals and been cited widely in memoirs and academic writing. She is the co-editor of *Talking Home, Writings by Women of Colour in Germany* (1999). In 2004 she was awarded the May Ayim Award (Poetry), the first Black International Literature Award in Germany.



I get so bored people telling me what is art
Black is not art
Art is not black
They say art is art for art sake
By itself
When what they mean is white ...
- *Our freedom is ours* (poem)

Yvette Christiansë

Yvette Christiansë is a novelist, poet, and scholar. She was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. She was raised in that city, and Cape Town, as well as Mbabane, Swaziland. In her late teens her family moved to Australia to escape apartheid. In 1999, Yvette Christiansë published her first full volume of poetry, *Castaway*, which was nominated for the PEN International prize. In 2006, she published the novel, *Unconfessed*, which was a finalist for the Hemingway/PEN Prize for first fiction and recipient of the 2007 ForeWord Magazine BEA Award. It was also nominated for the University of Johannesburg Prize and the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award in 2008. Yvette Christiansë now lives in New York City where she teaches African American and postcolonial literatures, as well as poetics, at Fordham University. She has also served as a Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Duke University and Barnard College. She has taught at Princeton University, has been a National Research Council Fellow at the University of Witwatersrand, and a visiting writer at the University of Cape Town. Her most recent poetry collection is entitled *Imprendehora*. Her poetry has been published in the United State, South Africa, Australia, Canada, France and Italy. It has appeared in such journals as *Ai*, *Barrow Street*, *Carapace*, *Columbia Magazine*, *Europe Magazine*, *Southerly*, *Sulfur*, and *West Coast Line*. She is on the Editorial Board of *Guernica Magazine* and is a participant in 'Women for Children's Rights' in South Africa. She is represented by Geri Thoma of the Markson Thoma Agency.



Sold? Sold? That old pain made her cough. Her throat was closing up as if a rope had at last been placed around it. She thought of a freedom so close, a freedom stolen. - *Unconfessed*, p. 3

Sasha Pimental Chacón

Born in Manila, Philippines, Sasha Pimental Chacón is the author of *Insides She Swallowed*, a collection of poems about the landscapes of culture, the body, and eating. Her poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in journals such as *The American Poetry Review*, *Callaloo*, *Colorado Review*, *The Florida Review*, *OCHO*, and *In The Grove*, among others. She is the winner of an Academy of American Poets Prize, a former Philip Levine fellow, and a recent multiple Pushcart-prize nominee. She is the editor of *BorderSenses*. She teaches creative writing, poetry, and Asian American Literature at the University of Texas at El Paso. Pimental Chacón holds an MFA from California State University, Fresno. She lives in the border community of El Paso-Ciudad Juárez with her husband, author Daniel Chacón.



Wanted: Encyclopedia Missing from Move

I lost the Ws once. Walnuts, Wagner, a warble.
Lost the Wampanoag Indians, their wampum,
the peak I climbed which started with a W –
-*Insides She Swallowed*

Learning to Eat

This is the taste
of memory, sweet pluck of
death. Later, teach them
to eat as you have, the broken
fruit flesh of your own
body, its hard growths tart
in your mouth, nervous and rising.
-*Insides She Swallowed*

Selfa Chew



Author, activist, and literary organizer Selfa Chew holds a BA in Communication Science from the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, an MA in History and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at El Paso. She is an editor for the literary review *BorderSenses* and for the *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea*. Selfa has conducted writing workshops for children residents of the Juvenile Center in Cd. Juárez and for migrant students at Canutillo Independent School District. She collaborates as a graphic artist and translator in the project *Memorias del Silencio*, the publishing texts written by immigrant workers in El Paso area. Selfa coordinates the annual Mexican Contemporary Literature Conference at the University of Texas at El Paso. She has published two books: *Azogue en la raíz* and *Mudas las Garzas*. She translated *Corridos in the Migrant Memory*. Her poems, short stories, and plays have been published in *Versal*, *Cantera Verde*, *Upstreet*, *Common Ground Review*, *Revista Tragaluz*, and other literary magazines. In 2007, her poems, sculptures, and photographs were part of the exhibit *Entrecruces: Femicide in Cd. Juárez* at Universidad Autónoma de Cd. Juárez. In 2009, she was a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Saint Lawrence. Currently, she is a doctoral student in History at the University of Texas at El Paso.

No sería necesario un conteo de tus brazos/ o del número de dedos/ porque ya no podríamos señalar/ al gato a la luna a nuestra hija/ ni con tu índice/ ni con el mío./ No podrías abrazarme nuevamente/ si me dijeran que has herido/ a un niño en el desierto. -*Should they tell me*

Kathy Staudt



Kathleen (Kathy) Staudt is a Professor of Political Science at The University of Texas at El Paso. She teaches courses on democracy, borders, public policy, and women and politics. Staudt has published fourteen books, the last six of which focus on the US-Mexico Border. They include: *Violence and Activism at the U.S.-Mexico Border...* (University of Texas Press 2008) and *Human Rights along the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gendered Violence and Insecurity* (University of Arizona Press 2009) (co-edited). Of *Violence and Activism*, Oscar J. Martínez, Regents Professor of History at the University of Arizona remarks, “In this sensitive book about border violence, Staudt provides illuminating answers to perplexing questions long asked by people around the world about recent grotesque crimes against women in the notorious city of Ciudad Juárez.... Spotlighting the frustrated efforts of public and private institutions to address the problem, Staudt eloquently points out the urgent need for greater gender justice on the border.” In 2010, Staudt and her colleagues at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte will release a book entitled *Cities and Citizenship... in the Paso del Norte Metropolitan Region* (Palgrave). Staudt is active in community organizations. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin.

Whether discussing women, displaced workers, ghetto dwellers or youth, the language is the same. Large-scale, macro-level structures have set the stage that disempowers people, and yet staff from some of those same structures revisit the stage with empowerment language. In this process, do women and other marginalized people acquire power to shift power relations? - *Rethinking Empowerment...*, p. 97

Natasha Gordon- Chipembere



Natasha Gordon-Chipembere holds a PhD in English from the University of South Africa. Her dissertation was entitled *From Silence to Speech, From Object to Subject: The Body Politic Investigated in the Trajectory between Sarah Baartman and Contemporary Circumcised African Women's Writing*. She holds an MA in African Literature from the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa, an MA in Education and Curriculum Development from Teachers College, Columbia University and a BA in English from Vassar College. She has published articles in *Agenda* and *Changing English*. She is currently under contract for a memoir collaboration with gender activist, Catherine Chipembere of Malawi. Her second book project, which is currently under review, is an edited collection—the first of its kind—entitled *Claiming Sarah Baartman: The Politics around Black Womanhood, Identity and Representation in Africa and the Diaspora*. Through a Fulbright Scholar Exchange Fellowship, she will be teaching African Diasporic Women's Literature at Chancellor College, University of Malawi in summer 2010. She is an Assistant Professor of English at Medgar Evers College, City University of New York and lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children.

Catherine Chipembere, at 74, is not who she is because she married Henry Masauko Chipembere in 1957 and irrevocably joined her life's path to Malawi's destiny. Catherine Chipembere is who she is because of her dedication to gender equity, her belief in humanity and justice, her unrivaled love of children and her solid education - rare for an African girl raised in colonial Nyasaland. -*Watch This Woman: The Story of Catherine Mary Ajizinga Chipembere of Malawi*

Angie Cruz



Angie Cruz was conceived in the Dominican Republic and born and raised in Washington Heights, New York City. She traveled to the D.R. every summer until she was 16. She attended New York City's prestigious LaGuardia High School. She planned to be a fashion designer, but soon her literary career took off. In 1993, four of her children's stories were featured on BET's Story Porch. She graduated from SUNY Binghamton in 1996 and received her MFA from New York University in 1999. Her fiction and activist work have earned her the New York Foundation of the Arts Fellowship, the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund Award, and the Bronx Writers' Center Van Lier Literary Fellowship. She is the author of *Soledad* and *Let it Rain Coffee*. *The San Francisco Chronicle* declared *Soledad* "A vivid, breathtaking cityscape teeming with raw beauty, danger, magic. . ." Of *Let it Rain Coffee*, *The New York Times'* Mark Schone remarked, "There are interludes reminiscent of García Márquez... and others that reveal Cruz's own distinctive narrative gifts." *The El Paso Times* commented, "Cruz is adept at weaving the distinct personalities into the disconcerting fabric of the immigrant nightmare... With such a sharp ear for voice and knack for characterization, Cruz is on the cusp of master storytelling." Currently, Cruz teaches in the Department of English at Texas A & M. Her recent work has been published in the *New York Times*, *Callaloo*, and *Latina Magazine*. (Photo by Paolo Piscitelli from *The Meridian*, the student newspaper of Lehman College, The City University of New York .)

Victor, my grandmother says. You better leave before that bruja comes into my house. That's all I'm saying. -*Soledad*, p. 72

Cynthia Bejarano

Cynthia Bejarano, a native of Southern New Mexico and the El Paso/Juárez border, is an Associate professor of Criminal Justice at New Mexico State University. Her publications and research interests focus on border violence, immigration issues, and gender violence at the U.S.-Mexico border. She is the author of the book *Qué Onda?: Urban Youth Cultures and Border Identity*, published by the University of Arizona Press in 2005 and the co-editor of an interdisciplinary anthology with Rosa-Linda Fregoso entitled *Terrorizing Women: A Cartography of Femicide in the Américas* (forthcoming in 2010 from Duke University Press). Her work has been published in *Frontiers*; *Race and Ethnic Studies*; *Criminology and Public Policy* and other collections like *Violence and the Body*. She has written other co-authored pieces on gender violence including, “The Disarticulation of Justice in a Global City: Precarious Life and (Un) paradigmatic Sexual Murders in The Paso del Norte Region” with Julia Monárrez Frago for the book, *Citizenship and Cities at the U.S.-Mexican Border: The Paso del Norte Metropolitan Region*, edited by Cesar Fuentes, Julia Monárrez Frago, and Kathleen Staudt, and “Analyzing Conquest through a Border Lens: Vulnerable Communities at the Mexico-U.S. and Moroccan-Spanish Border Regions” for the book, *El Río Bravo Mediterráneo: Las regiones fronterizas en la época de la globalización*, edited by Natalia Ribas-Mateos. Bejarano is also the principal investigator for a million dollar federally and state funded program which assists the children of farmworkers to attend the University, and she is the co-founder of Amigos de las Mujeres de Juarez, an organization working with Mexican women’s rights organizations to end the violence against women in Chihuahua, Mexico and the borderlands.



Joyce Stahmer

Joyce Stahmer is a storyteller, modern griot and keeper of the words. She was reared in West Jupiter, Florida, a rich community of zany and wonderful characters not unlike those in the folk stories of Zora Neale Hurston. Ms. Stahmer’s exposure to storytelling began at an early age owing to the influences of her mother and elderly friends. She credits her professional storytelling beginnings to the period in which she lived in Washington state and to being a member of the Olympia Storytelling Guild. Her interactions, while there, with Debe Edden and Dr. Maxine Mimms contributed to her professional development as a storyteller. She also performed with the Heartsparkle Players, a playback theater group in Olympia, Washington. Ms. Stahmer has been a professional storyteller for 17 years, and a re-teller of stories all her life, and has delighted audiences, nationally and internationally, with her raw power, unique sense of humor, and ability to incorporate songs within her vast repertoire of stories. Her work in the community, activism for various causes, and her keen observations of self and others all serve to enrich and give multiple and significant meanings to her stories. Ms. Stahmer graduated from The Evergreen State College with a B.A. in Literature and Education. She is employed at University of Texas at El Paso in the African American Studies program as an administrative assistant. When not at the college, she spends most of her time storytelling and facilitating impromptu speaking workshops; giving keynote addresses; lecturing; conducting anti-oppression training; and volunteering in the community. However, her most important task is keeping up with her 18 grandchildren.



Myriam J.A. Chancy



Myriam J. A. Chancy is a Haitian-Canadian writer born in Port-au-Prince. Her first novel, *Spirit of Haiti*, was a finalist in the Best First Book Category, Canada/Caribbean region, of the Commonwealth Prize. She is also the author of two books of literary criticism, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* and *Searching for Safe Spaces: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* as well as a second novel, *The Scorpion's Claw*. Irene D'Souza of the *Winnipeg Free Press* described the book: "...The prose is energetic and filled with poignancy so deeply felt, it resonates long after the story has been told.... Chancy is a writer who cares about words and pace and tells her story in deft strokes." Chancy's book *Searching for Safe Spaces* was awarded an Outstanding Academic Book Award 1998 by *Choice*. Her work as the Editor-in-Chief of the Ford-funded academic/arts journal, *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* was recognized with the Phoenix Award for Editorial Achievement by the CLEJ in 2004. Her third academic book, *From Sugar to Revolution: Women's Visions of Haiti, Cuba and the Dominican Republic* is forthcoming, and her third novel, *The Loneliness of Angels* has just been released. She has recently completed a collection of memoir essays entitled, *Fractured*, and is currently at work on an academic book entitled, *Floating Islands: Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism and Racial Identity Formation*, as well as a young adult novel entitled *The Escape Artist*. Chancy received her Ph.D. from The University of Iowa. (Photo by Eddie Harris.)

I felt that I was one of these women, a laundry woman, a working woman. My heart was full of worms when I saw them, adults and children alike, locked in these battles as if they had no choice. - *The Scorpion's Claw*, p. 13

Ana-Maurine Lara



Ana-Maurine Lara is the author of *Erzulie's Skirt - A Novel*, which was selected as a Lambda Literary finalist in 2006. Rigoberto González of the *El Paso Times* described the book: "Infused with the language of ritual and indigenous beliefs, 'Erzulie's Skirt' is a credible narrative, in which dreams and the spirit world communicate with the living, blurring boundaries and borders as a method of teaching humanity about tolerance and the curative nature of hope." Lara's poetry and short fiction has appeared in several literary journals including *Blithe House Quarterly*, *The Encyclopedia Project*, *Sable Lit-Mag*, and *Torch Magazine*. She has received awards from the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, Puffin Foundation, the Brooklyn Arts Council and PEN Northwest. Lara's second (unpublished) novel, *Anacaona's Daughter*, won Third Place Prize in the National Latino/Chicano Literary Prizes competition. Lara is a Cave Canem Fellow and a member of The Austin Project, a collaborative workshop between artists, activists and scholars out of UT-Austin. She coordinates an oral history project documenting the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender artists titled: We are the Magicians, the Path Breakers and the Dream Makers (<http://themagicmakers.blogspot.com>) and is also co-author of bustingbinaries.com, a website dedicated to addressing binary thinking in U.S. based social justice movements. She is a graduate of Harvard University.

'Miserables,' she mumbled. She exited past the old men slamming dominos on the bulletin-board table. 'Here I was thinking these people would be kind enough...' - *Erzulie's Skirt*, p. 119