

Baptized by

Aji



Gracias, añay, thanks. To Criselda Dillague for taking my “make it pollo a la brasa-y”art direction & creating stunning cover artwork.

To the Copper IUD that failed my mamá . Al camión que mi Abuelito Braulio estrelló y causó que huyera a su padrastro en Calca. To the horse that knocked him off during his short-lived jockey career and caused my Abuelita to visit him in the hospital. Para mi Abuelita Rita quien aprendió a leer sola. A sus humitas. Para Chachapoyas y su pueblo guerrero. Para mis Abuelitos a quien nunca conocí. A mi papá por su cariño y amor que me hizo una engreída. Por la colección de gatos Garfield que me regaló. Por sus cachangas. A mi mamá por sus risas y su alegría y también por nunca dejar que nadie me pise el poncho. Por su papa a la huancaína. Para mi hermano, for vacuuming my hair and fighting off a bully at the bus stop. Por Sherman Chasqui, for being the most loving 92 lb labrador retriever.

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Para quienes han comido papas fritas con ají, y
después se han tocado los ojos.

For those who have eaten French fries with ají,
and then touched their eyes.

Bouquets

Before there was me, there was pollo a la brasa.

Fingers baptized sticky with aji and mayonesa,

My parents unstuck their fingers from paper thin
napkins,

Thumb grazing my forehead to form a Tumi,

A mark of devotion to sacrifice,

Before there was me,

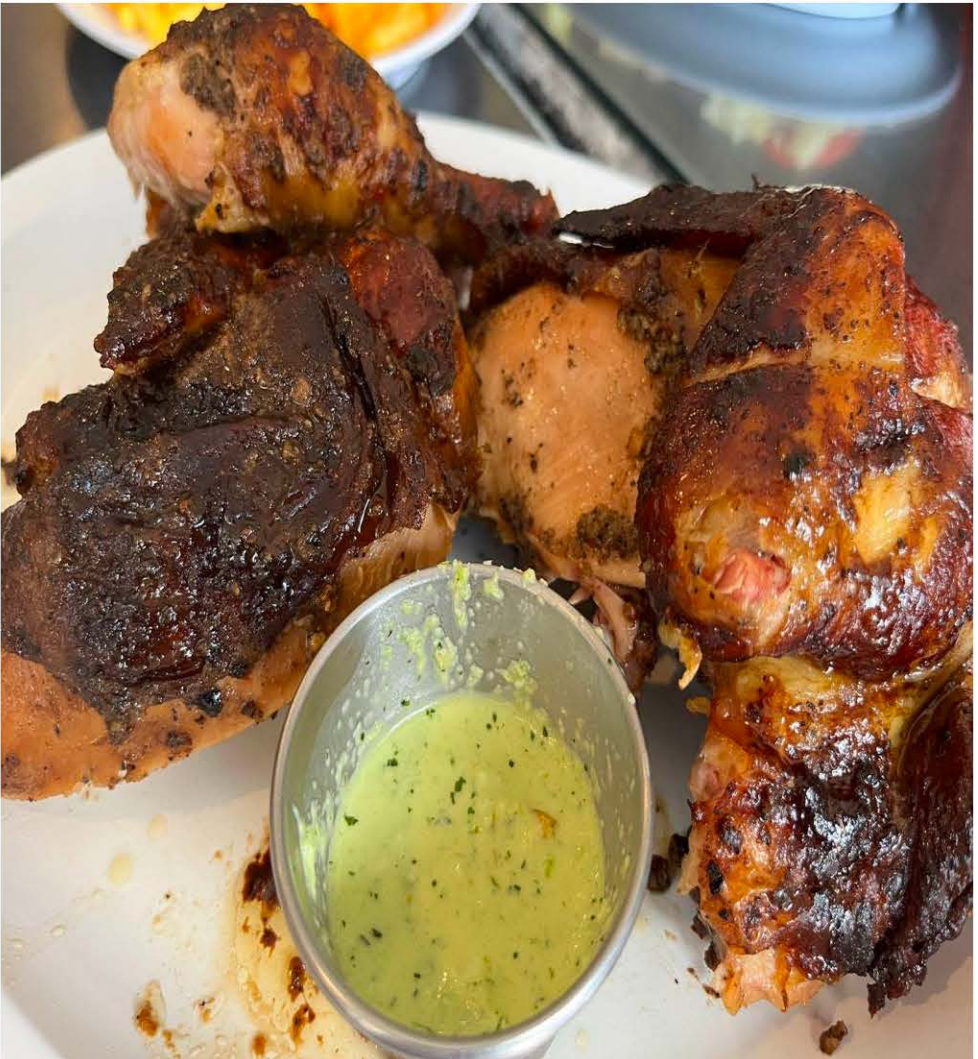
There were offerings of pollo a la brasa by my papa,

Wrapped in plastic bags,

Used to charm my abuelitos,

An unofficial dowry pagado en pollos that said,

See I'm a provider



Peruvian Poultry Passport

La Embajada Peruana

Norky's is located at 5610 Hanley Rd # 110, Tampa, FL 33634. Technically, it is called "Norky's Pollos a La Brasas," but I guarantee you will find the largest concentration of Peruanos in the diaspora per square foot in this Tampa strip mall.

It is across the "United Skates of America," a technicolor 80's wonder roller rink fever dream. Another relic, is nearby, the "An-ti-ques" boutique where at six years old I tried and failed to explain to my Abuelita the concept of antiques. My Abuelita did not understand why Americans would pay higher prices for outdated and largely dysfunctional items (1st world luxuries, ya know?). At 30, here is the explanation I would have given, imagine people who have enough money to willingly buy older items at a higher cost for delight, fancy and the most powerful of drugs, nostalgia.

Norky's is also known to my English-speaking friends as "the chicken place." The Consulate should tbh open up a kiosko in Norky's for efficiency to distribute DNI's at this Inka Cola watering hole. Multigenerational Peruvian families park in front, exiting the U.S. and enter Peruvian territory once they enter Norky's.

La Embajada Peruana Cont'd

To understand me, you must understand Pollo a la Brasa.

Pollo a La Brasa is rotisserie style chicken, served with French fries and aji, a spicy huacatay based sauce. A pollería, is a restaurant that serves pollo a la brasa, but such a brief explanation feels lacking for this cultural phenomenon.

Norky's and pollerías in general exist as Peruvian peninsulas. They are cultural bridges linking la madre patria with los United. It should be noted that this Norky's has no affiliation with Norky's found in Peru, one of two most popular pollería chains, Roky's (in an outdated SAT analogy, Norky's: Rokys, akin to McDonald's vs. Burger King)

Pollerías are anchored by first gen Peruvian immigrants searching for the familiar, who will taste the pollo and sigh, "esta rico, pero no es como en el Perú. En el país del ciego, el tuerto es rey." I am not part of this group. I exist in a bit of a liminal space like many others, who were born in Peru, but raised in the U.S. since I was prematurely taken out of mi nido. Quick note to the reader, it's not time to write an essay about how Fujimorismo propelled the creation of the 90's/2000's diaspora peruana.

La Embajada Peruana Cont'd

At four years old, I was apparently so confused about my identity that when my parents asked me where I was born that I answered, "Tampa." My parents laughed at the absurdity of this.

Norky's was the first Peruvian restaurant I remember in Tampa. I remember the excitement my papa had when we entered for the first time. I was not yet tall enough to peer over the vitrinas holding alfajores y chicha morada.

Norky's was where I became aware of being Peruana.

Perhaps because it was the first physical space that was rooted in its Peruvian identity aside from our family's home that I could remember being in. Physical spaces matter for the diaspora, it materializes collective identity in a place where assimilation leads to self-erasure.

Inside Norky's there is the Blanquirroja, the Peruvian flag, along with other symbols, such as the "Tumi, a ceremonial knife used in Andean cultures, both pre-Incan and Post-Incan. I had no memory of ever seeing so many Peruanos juntos, families just like my own gathered, ripping the skin off the Pollo a la brasa, hands sticky from aji, with carcajadas intermingling with the aromas.



“La única forma que sobrevives en este país es tener la familia unida.”

The writer with her parents and brother in Norky's, moments before pollo a la brasa is served, 2018.

The Last Flight

Stunned, I hear my pollo a la brasa indignantly
squawking,

It resprouts feathers,

Bopping the TSA officer before taking flight

I stuffed an entire pollo a la brasa

Con papas fritas

Inside my backpack

Googling whether TSA would take it away,

Penguins proffer pebble proposals for their mates,

This Peruana will use pollo a la brasa as her pebble to
show love,

I hold my breath as my backpack passes thru mysterious
x-ray tunnel,

The Last Flight Cont'd

TSA Inspectorman looks a prototype of every white man
I've feared,

Thin-lipped, square forehead, military-meets SuperCuts
cropped hair,

His bony hands pull my backpack away for secondary
inspection,

I've been under secondary inspection my whole life,

He asks what's inside,

My lips stumble out- chicken and fries

Layer by layer of target grocery bags,

Tightly knotted,

The aroma grows stronger,

As he unwraps each bag,

The Last Flight Cont'd

Revealing,

Plump breasts,

Thick Thighs,

Juice dripping,

Off of fries,

This poultry sensuality was not meant for him!

Only for my lover's eyes

Feliz 28

Las fiestas patrias no se sienten ya que no hay feriado acá,

Pero igual, hay que parar en los grifos para comprar tarjetas antes de que aparezca nuestro Santo, Santo Whatsapp que escucha nuestras peticiones sin límites de tiempo.

¡No te olvides de marcar 011-511!

“Cuídate mamá de la humedad este invierno, que no te vaya entrar el frío al pecho.... ¿Te llegó el dinero que envié?”, “Abuelito, te quiero mucho, me esperas por favor” “... primita cuando regrese que te parece si nos comemos un ceviche juntas?”

No habrá la misa televisada donde los Presidentes juran dar todo por el país antes de volverse sus presos,

“¿Puedes cambiar el canal? Ya no quiero ver Cuarto Poder (también conocido con cine de terror en mi familia), siempre es lo mismo,” Mi mama se queja.

Feliz 28 cont'd

El desfile no pasará por el Centro aca,

Nuestro desfile- nuestro patrimonio, será el estacionamiento de la pollería en Hanley Road, repleto de carros, mayormente camionetas usadas, para cargar la diáspora peruana multigeneracional,

Hoy es el 28 de julio,

Ordenaremos 2 pollos a la brasa para que estén listos,

Casi habrá otra razón para celebrar nuestra independencia,

Norky's está repleto de todas las familias Peruanas en estos códigos postales,

El equivalente a una combi en hora punta en Abancay,

Pasa 1 hora,

y los comensales que pidieron sus pollos preguntan,
"Señorita, cuanto mas demoraran?"

Feliz 28 cont'd

Pasan 2 , "Ya se me esta llenando el hambre!!

Casi 3,"Porque caraJO demoran tanto?

¿No será que los cocineros han ido a matar los pollos y todavía los están desplumando?

Un Enfrentamiento

Las barrigas de la diáspora peruana contra sus platos vacíos,

Yo me siento mal- la meseras han llegado a su límite de paciencia,

El cocinero aparece, ningún plumas pueden ser vistas, ni sangre en su mandil,

"Se nos han acabado las papas, por eso hay un atraso"

Se siente un temblor de voces indignadas,

5.5 Richter scale, no 7.5, no 9....

Feliz 28 cont'd

“¿Pero como se le van a acabar papas a una pollería PERUANA?”

La ironía no es sutil, Perú, es la cuna de la papa,

Pregúntale a cualquier Peruana y te dará su tesis de como Perú tiene 5,000 variedades de papa, cómo salvamos el mundo del hambre, y como Peru NO irelandia es el país originario de la papa...siguiera pero estaríamos acá hasta que lleguen los ángeles del apocalipsis...

Mi hermano se va del restaurante, y aparece cargando dos bolsas de papas,

“Aquí están papas que he comprado para que cocines.”

El cocinero rechaza la entrega de las papas,

Ni siquiera se digna en abrir las bolsas.

“Estas papas no sirven, no son buenas para freir.”

A Phone Call

Mama asks my brother to call the polleria ahead of our arrival.

He dials through our landline:

Mi hermano pregunta, “Aló? Llamo para salvar un pollo.”

La mesera de Norky’s responde, “Bueno, disculpa pero no es posible salvar un pollo, ya que están cocinados.”

Mi hermano responde, “Ya bueno, necesito salvar un pollo con papas.”

Mama giggles- aware of the mistranslation that just occurred.

Apparently there’s a difference between salvar/ reservar in Spanish, and one requires that poultry to be dead.

Que Dios Bendiga Los Pollerías

We're safe here,

No explanations are given and no verbal citations to who we are, where Peru is on a map, in proximity to the U.S. of course, the only referential point.

No one is asking if we've ridden a llama, and gasped at confirmation to know that si, comemos cuy, si ya se que era la mascota de tu clase, no- no me importa tus opiniones.

We're safe here,

No one is quoting the Emperor's New Groove back to us, or insulting the capacity of our ancestors by declaring that yes! It was E.T. and Mars Attacks! Who built Machu Picchu,

We're safe here, no one is asking us if we are "illegals" or calling us criminals and rapists,

Here no one is telling me to Speak english, to Speak American,

Here no one is squinting their faces at the accent my
mama

We're safe here,

Here I am not exotic or culturally ambiguous,

Actually, I am safe here as long as I do not open Hinge,
where white men with large swordfish are hungry for
something else to mount,

Tell me- if intergenerational memory is real? What do they
see when they look at me?

We're safe here,

Here we say fuck you to borders and geopolitics of
exclusion in between stuffing papas fritas into our Kirby-
esque mouths

La polleria is the closest some of us might ever back to
the Mustard Custard walls of Jorge Chavez International
Airport,

Here I can see the largest concentration of my people and
stare back to wonder what I will look like as an elder.

Hay que comprar un pollo

Vinieron a visitar tus abuelitos,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Te sacaste buenas notas, te sacaron del ESOL y te pusieron a leer al frente de todos,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Papá se quedó sin trabajo, veo la sombra de preocupación en su rostro,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

estamos en recesión todos lo saben,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Me gradué de la universidad,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Quiero enamorarme, me duele mi dedo índice se tanto Hinge swiping, hasta se esta moviendo solo,

Abuelita falleció, los pasajes están muy caros de
último momento,

Hay que comprar un pollo

Mamá ira sola,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Hoy ingrese a la escuela de derecho,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Estamos obsesionados con romper el ciclo de la
pobreza,

Hay que comprar un pollo

Hoy me caí y derrame chicha morada encima de la
pared blanca en la cocina,

Hay que comprar un pollo,

Hoy me recordé de tu cara, después de que nos
besamos con bocas con sabor a pollo frito Koreano

Hay que comprar un pollo...

About the Author:



Marisol Silva Pilares is a Peruvian-American poet & writer. Her poetry is on Instagram on @Mami_soy_emo about growing up in the liminal of two Americas, therapy, pollo a la brasa & ancestral memory. She's embracing her Andina roots by learning Quechua and folkloric Peruvian dances. She believes there's magic in the mouth numbness caused by spicy aji amarillos. She was a Roots, Wounds, Words poetry fellow. Her writing has been featured in "Chifladazine", "Wisdom Body Collective", "Rimay y Raiz" zine, & mamisoyemo.substack.com.

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