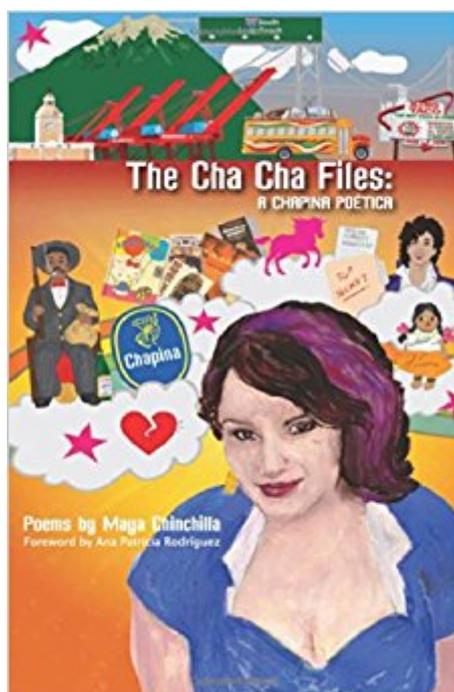


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The Cha Cha Files:: A Chapina Poética



Synopsis

The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poética by Maya Chinchilla is a timely debut that makes visible the Central American-Guatemalan diaspora and disentangles the myths from the mayhem of civil wars, urban wars, and the wars raging in young hearts. Part memory, part imaginary, The Cha Cha Files honors Central American feministas, Long Beach roqueras, families divided by war, lovers separated by borders, and celebrates the pleasure and heartbreak of femmes, machas, y mariconadas. These poems, stories, and snapshots traverse California coastlines and southern borderlines, cut across tense multi-culti high-school hallways, sing Solidarity Movement songs, mosh through tribal slam pits, and find home in the vibrant Bay Area where radical activists and lovers alike come of age. Chinchilla's hopeful and uniquely Chapina voice emerges as a significant contribution to U.S. Latina/o literary works.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The work of Maya Chinchilla in The Cha Cha Files proved to be incredibly thought-provoking, passionate, and entertaining. Her identity as a Central American of Guatemalan and Mayan decent growing up in America, allows her, to make up what it means to be Guatemalan-hyphen-American in many of the rooms she finds herself in. I believe the most crucial point to arise out of The Cha Cha Files was the concept of searching for identity within the constructs American society provides. Her poetry gives a vivid and emotional portrayal of what it is like to attempt to situate yourself and come to terms with your identity in a cultural context that demands its actors choose a defined role. Chinchilla, writing as a queer Latina woman, is able to offer a perspective on questions of identity that sets aside a theoretical outlook and embraces the

subjective experience. The quote from the opening paragraph comes from one of the most powerful poems of the collection, *What it's Like to Be a Central American Unicorn for Those Who Aren't*, where her experience as a woman who is forced to associate with an imaginary homeland, comes to the forefront. It is not that Chinchilla rejects her heritage, but rather the many ways in which one may expect her to connect to a Guatemalan identity (language, indigenous customs, etc.) do not always apply to her life. This feeling of disconnect to her roots is exemplified when she says, *"I haven't been 'back' in ten years."* Throughout her work she comes to grips with the fact that she is neither embraced as an American (a "unicorn" in American society), nor does she find herself able to understand what it means to have grown up in Guatemala and be forced to migrate. She is a product of the diaspora, not an agent within it.

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