

# North

A selection of poetry by Zazil Alaíde Collins\* and María Cristina Hall\*\*

Illustrations by Xanic Galván\*\*\*

This poetry sample put together by Collins and Hall showcases two identities that have been constructed from a place of otherhood — Collins, as a Mexican in El Paso, Texas, and Hall as a Mexican-American whose origins encompass both Guadalajara and New York. In an exercise of exchange, Hall has translated the following poems by Collins from Spanish to English.

## A FORTNIGHT IN THE WILDERNESS\*

\*After Alexis de Tocqueville's classic of the same name

Zazil Alaíde Collins

## Coral Drop

*L'indifferenza è il peso morto della storia.*

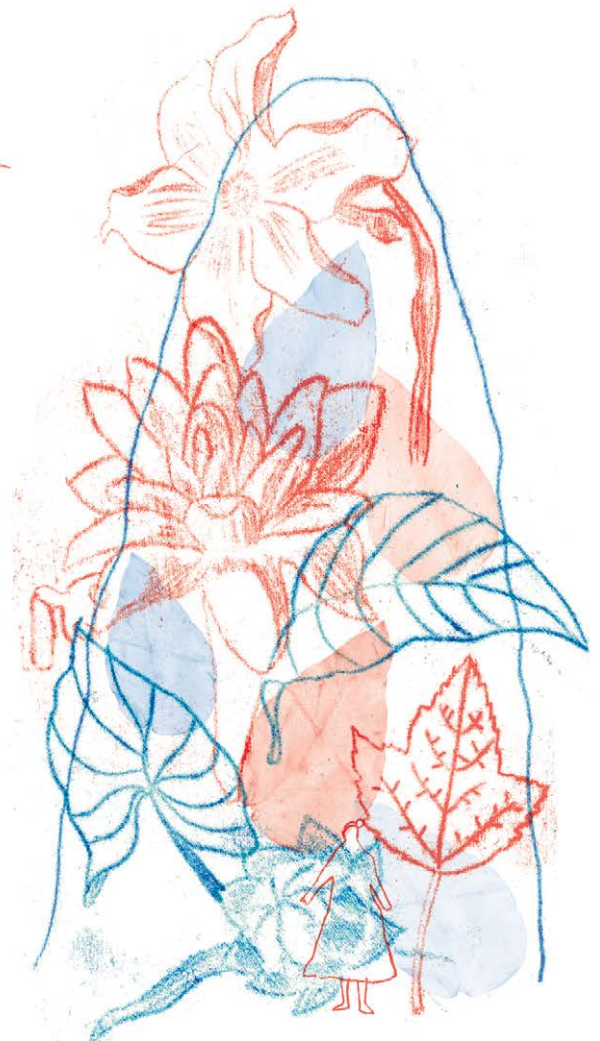
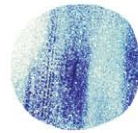
Antonio Gramsci

From the fire's bow, I,  
woman of the world's end  
beheld a country deserted,  
a domesticated  
State of exception,  
an implacable  
ghost nation  
: a country of memoricide  
crimson mountain, lumberjack

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: a country to lull mules  
in high-security prisons

[high security | high security]

in the tension of water  
and sad sleep songs

: a country for the apathetic

I hate them too, *partisano*  
to live is to take a side

: a country where the she-wolf howls  
at the vague night  
the bird epiphany  
smoke and calamity  
: a country to pretend  
that the current won't slog  
and that I'm not a woman  
at the end of the world  
on the smuggling ship  
of masticated words

*om ah ra pa tsa na dhi*  
*om ah ra pa tsa na dhi*  
*om ah ra pa tsa na dhi*

## Tittle 42

Suchiate white as the wound  
flesh cured on a salamander

Men to the north, women to the south  
a dying wish behind

His name in the letters of his name,  
Cristóbal Cabreiro Ramírez, age 35

And all of *Cuba* in the word Cuba  
land of syrup, red and white  
Suriname, Guyana, Venezuela,  
Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica,

Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala  
a jungle of cartridges at a stone's throw

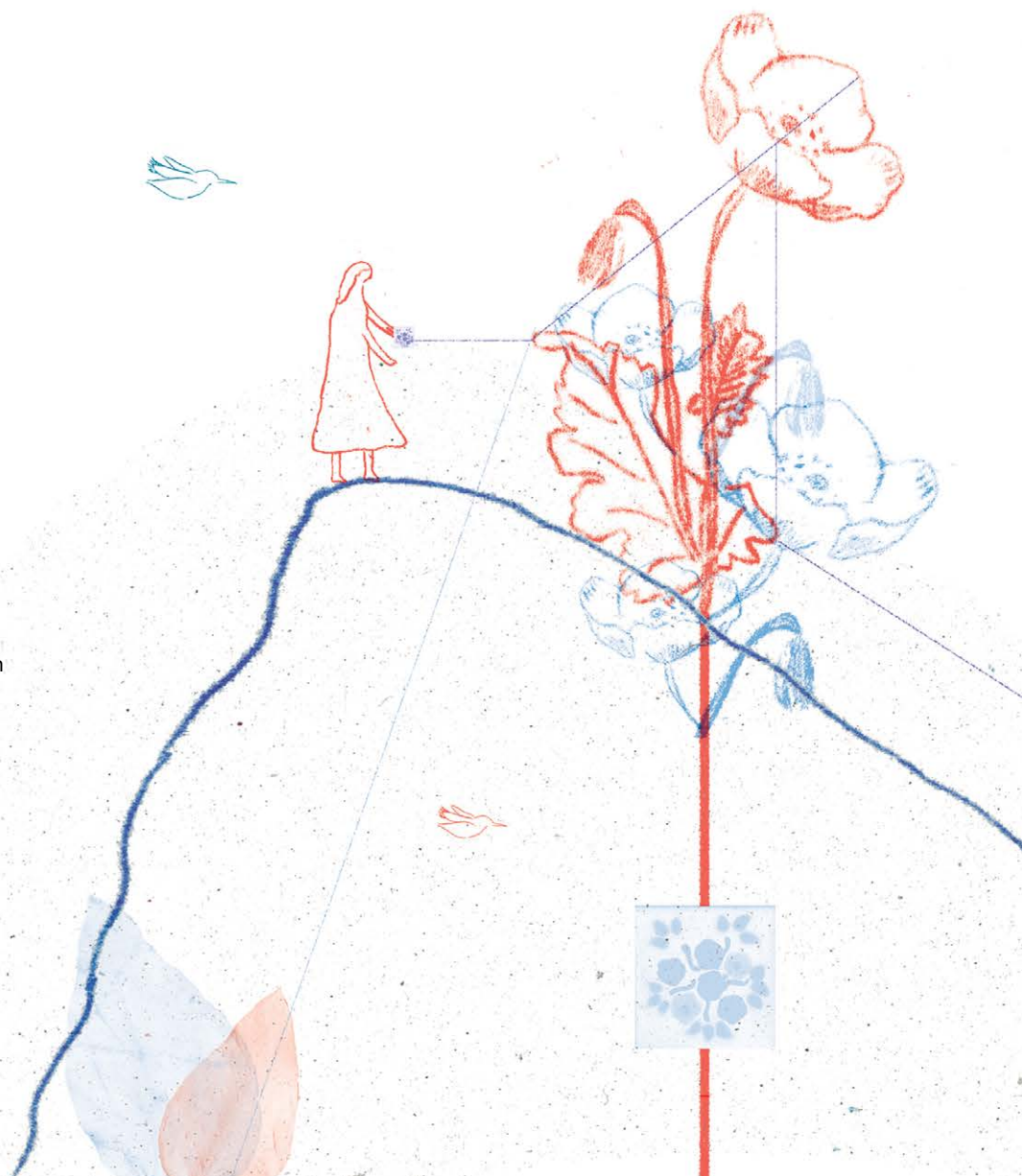
All of Mexico in the line of fire  
along Yuma red as embers

Onoruame, father and mother, Onoruame  
Cristóbal, age 35, died on the roadway

San Miguel del Padrón is waiting  
to free him of all infamy

of a covered-up migranticide  
in Pijijiapan, Chiapas

Onoruame, father and mother, Onoruame  
Cristóbal, age 35, died on the roadway



# Tutuguri

## I

The draught a breeze  
as río bravo is fierce

thistle in bloom  
to temper the blaze

a land-in-between  
chabochis screeching  
tutuguri in the ribs  
tutuguri the owl hoots  
for your return

## II

Brutality a rock  
as the ravine is calm

a ladleful of stew  
so I might march along

puente Nepantla  
scarring spilling

tutuguri white sun  
tutuguri  
tutuguri sol negro

## III

The world changes when two people dance  
souls burgeon in beef tongues

dust sifted down from the stars  
crossing in the dawn

For your return I holler  
I holler para no morir

óro óno óno *tawéri gá*  
óro óno óno *tawéri gá*  
óro óno óno *tawéri gá*

## IV

I charm you hilarity  
so your days might soften

I shepherd the cold  
brightness

like the wound of days  
blandos mis ojos  
radiating on the table  
surrounded by canyons  
and hickory.

## V

The cow's slumber threads  
the milky way's mourning

cemetery of stars nestled  
in the galactic river

that sketches, in my heart,  
the sun's eternal death

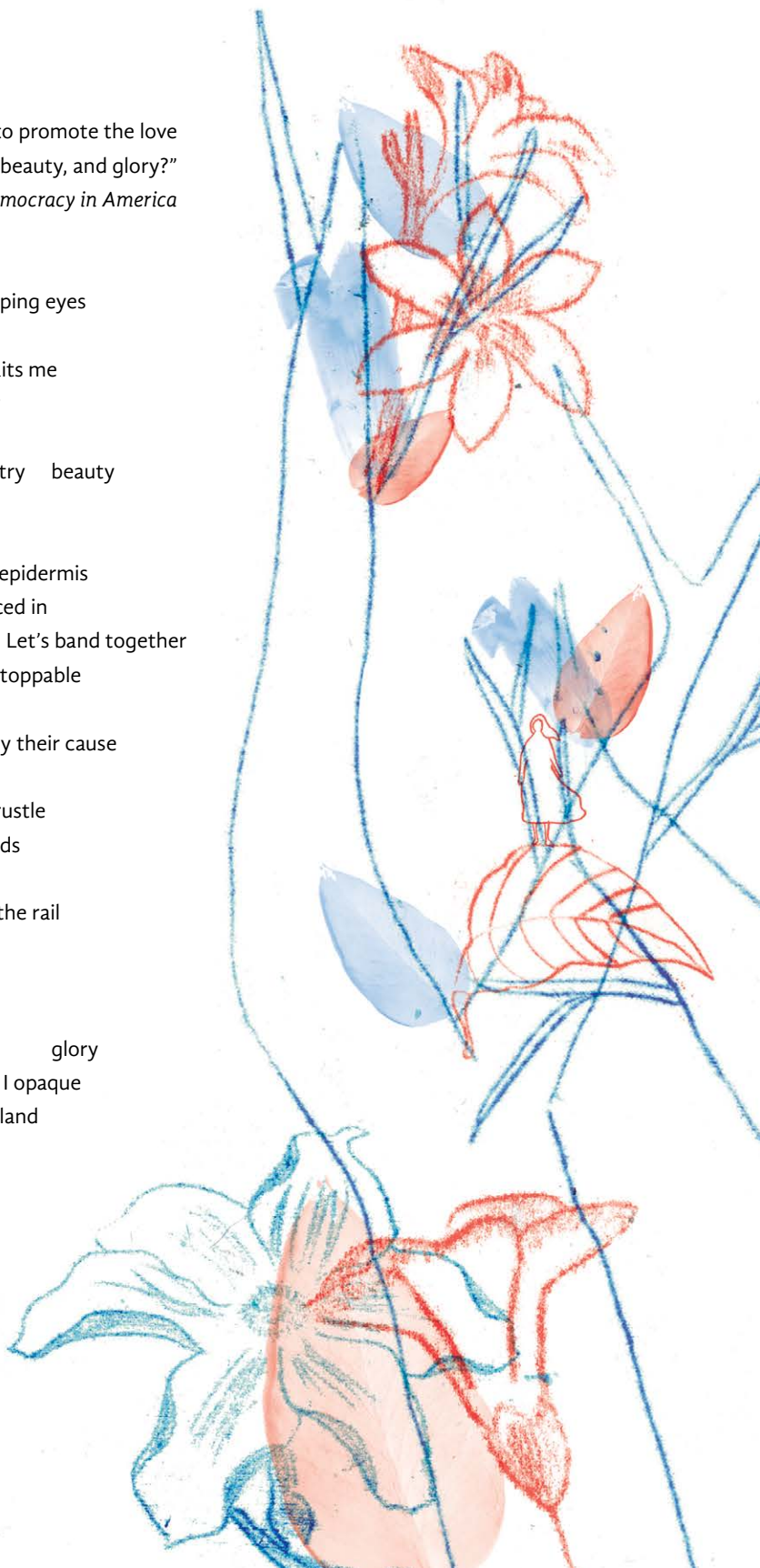
tutuguri  
Basalówala Aminá Ralámuli Paísila  
tutuguri



## The Second Ellis Island

“Is it your object [...] to promote the love  
of poetry, beauty, and glory?”  
Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

On the second Ellis Island the enigmatic fox man  
and I she coyote gale and all our gaping eyes  
stand in a sea of sand Silence at the center  
my flag reddened in the wind The herd awaits me  
in the city Tundras Sonatas Broncos marching slowly  
the Border Patrol detains the half moon  
a vine tainted in brothel dyes I want poetry beauty  
glory yes I do I will I'll take it  
on the second Ellis Island shirking backs and mature  
nymphs scraping the scales of history His epidermis  
also brims with me Me sitian rejas fenced in  
like the Unaccompanied Alien Children in Tornillo Let's band together  
the wall cries on the second Ellis The tram unstoppable  
the underlings agonize before its sacred heart  
Working women take up the pots poetry beauty and glory their cause  
The political force can't be ignored on the second Ellis  
the American executioner trills northern roadrunners rustle  
Dehydrated the purple cacti dazzle old wounds  
In the sky some planet devours filaments  
while the Grateful Dead sing Marty Robbins It's the rail  
of history A fortnight in the American  
wilderness like your Spirit Old Gold  
Trumpet a desert sweet west old date  
where no one else breathes poetry beauty and glory  
my reed sharpened in the plain He is gray and I opaque  
as I yearn to howl at the heart of the second Ellis Island



## RELATIVE

María Cristina Hall

Up

If we point up  
it won't be north  
we're signaling  
but the universe  
expanding.

In 1994  
we agreed upon  
a mutant identity.

What opaque rumors  
of insidious invasion  
speak of obsidian capital?

Only the stars' smoke  
will tell.



## *The Time I Realized I Wasn't White* <sup>[1]</sup>

I was nine and Grandma Miller introduced me  
at the San Diego Pentecostal church.  
I politely kissed her white friend  
on the cheek, to everyone's shock,  
and burned a red backdrop  
to my freckles.

A few years after my quinceañera  
my Spanish boyfriend corrected  
algo en las estructuras que no va  
flattened my accent in a cove of love  
a woman's grievances  
folded in papers he'd lock away  
childish confetti.

Feminism's just a petty excuse  
for my voice silenced  
from radical to analyst  
from beacon to branded  
from brilliant to affirmative action  
from man to woman.

I hide my phony diploma  
behind my leg  
check from the side of my eye  
if anyone's looking.  
The white boy couldn't get in anywhere  
because he was a white boy.

The time I was most white was when at twenty-five  
I capitalized on your adolescence in Virginia  
knew your South Asian wouldn't let you  
say no to me.  
That's the time I saw myself in you.

The time I was least white was when in Mexico  
a white man took my work  
and didn't invite me to the party.

In Spain at twenty-two  
my teacher called Latin America  
an insult to language  
in front of ten women and an institution  
that said the sun would do enough  
to dry me.

One time I wasn't white and  
didn't realize  
was at nineteen in New York  
when Becca Stein said the Spanish street names  
in my poem  
were disorienting  
like, is this Arizona or Mexico?  
because the way you've situated the text  
is confusing  
—to a white woman.

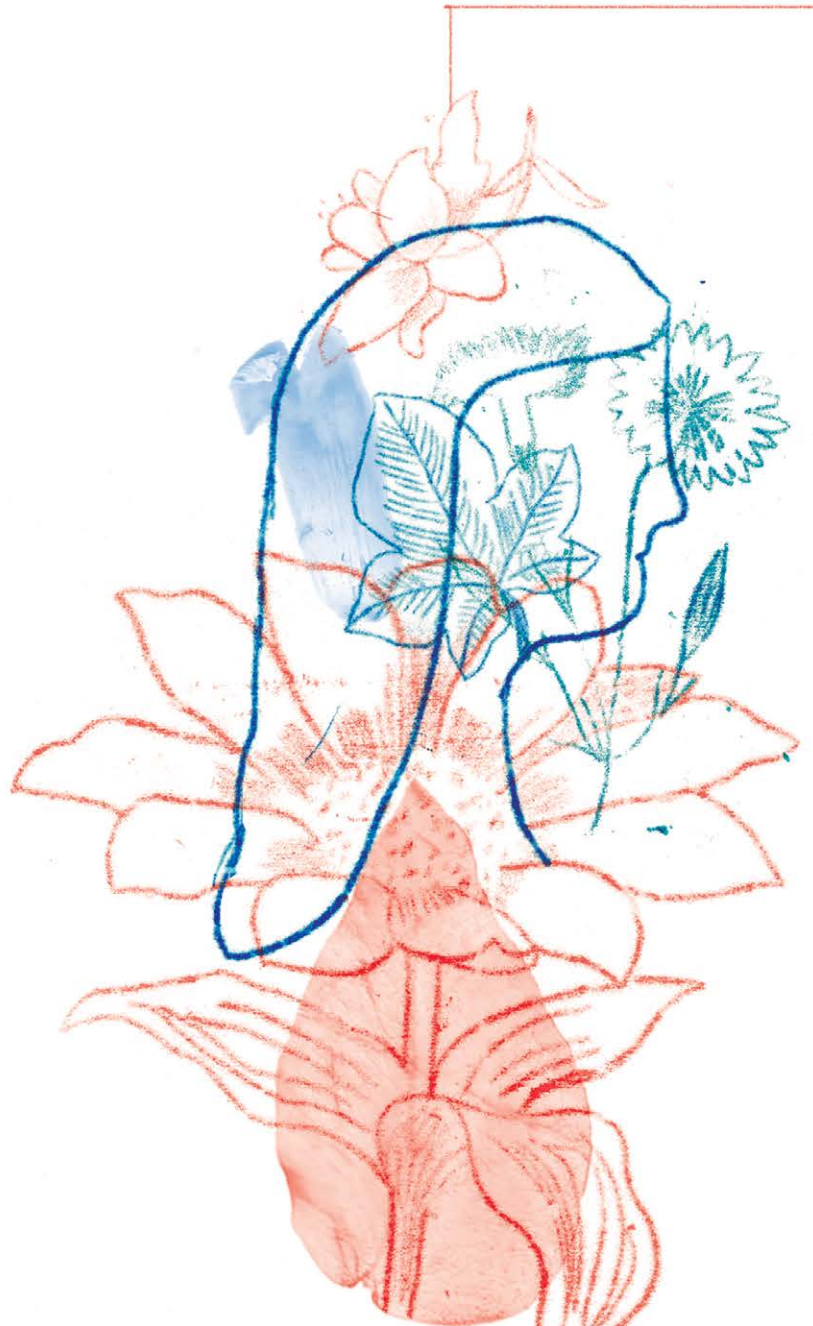
The time I felt most white was when  
at eighteen I read David Foster Wallace on SWE  
and agreed.  
The time I felt least white was when  
fuck you.

The time I felt least white was when  
people only care  
if your camera won't show your color negative  
if you can afford a camera, SWE, BMW, 401K.

The time I was least white was when  
insurance is only for residents  
and they pick up the phone and say who's speaking  
And I say María Fernández.

The time I felt least white was when  
I had a skinny iced latte in Polanco  
and my girlfriends said Chicanos  
weren't really Mexican.

The time I felt most white  
was when I laughed along.



## Elections

One body hits the sidewalk  
from nothing more than gravity.  
A tea kettle will go on whistling.  
Leave your headphones tight  
through crossnational bank transactions.  
La Bestia will go on whistling.  
A laptop screened through the salt  
of five extra hours at the airport.  
The silence you've practiced for relatives  
who somehow found their fired-up peace  
amid your war. Tonight,  
just us. A visa to your picket line.  
A brick I have laid down for you.  
A fort, a warmth, my body.

## The Mexican American War: Manifestations of Capitalism

art has been positioned before me  
a bearer of intrinsic value

tulips resilient  
mining the ice caps

a cryptic wall  
of blood vessels

scalps flap on the horse bridle  
severing the floodgates

-  
a memory valve  
of manifest destiny

currency cropped  
for futures

[1] The next three poems will be part of the book  
*Raw Age / La Hora Cruda* (Dharma Books, 2023).

