

**West Oakland Sutra for the  
AK-47 Shooter at 3:00 AM  
and other Oakland poems**

**Barbara Jane Reyes**

a Deep Oakland literary object  
Oakland, California  
2008

## **West Oakland Invocation**

*After Juan Felipe Herrera's "Blood Gang Call"*

Calling all scrap metal pickers,  
the ones wearing leaden paint instead of blue jeans  
Calling all watermelon & cherry vendors,  
come down the avenue to this traffic light  
Calling all asbestos ceiling scrapers,  
you, yes, you the ones with your faces like bandits  
Calling all barbwire twisters  
caught in the tetanus spell of puncture wound  
Calling all crane operators  
high up in the heaven of diesel smoke, leather faced  
Calling all corner store priests  
& corner store nuns & corner store saints worshipping cash money  
Calling all police line crossers  
in the coroner van, in the assembly bed of bag ladies  
Calling all cement pourers  
kneeling at the Krylon symbols chanting "Amen"  
Calling all weapon concealers  
dropping shells in the form of another brother gone  
Calling all micro mini skirts  
kicking lust down the Lower Bottoms  
Calling all Cadillac shiners  
pimpin' the sugary womb in search of babygirl  
Calling all backhoe pilots  
Excavating the dregs of this city grave, anonymous  
Calling all freeway weavers  
threading your arteries and veins with seismic retrofitting  
Calling all scrap metal pickers,  
the old ones wearing garbage bag chic.

## **West Oakland Litany**

*After "Litany" by Billy Collins*

You are the hole in my head  
I am the pain in your neck  
You are the lump in my throat  
I am the aching in your heart  
—John Doe, "Golden State"

You are the weeds and the front yard,  
the amber bottle and the malt liquor.  
You are the gum on the new asphalt  
and the burning house of the transients.  
You are the plaid shirt of the trucker,  
and the Canadian geese suddenly in attack.

However, you are not the sagging in the blue jeans,  
the dreadlocks on the brotha,  
or the house of meth dealers.  
And you are certainly not the toxic fume-scented air.  
There is just no way that you are the toxic fume-scented air.

It is possible that you are the bus stop under the freeway,  
maybe even the pigeon on the concrete mixer,  
but you are not even close  
to being the field of aluminum cans at dusk.

And a quick look in the liquor store window will show  
that you are neither the pimp in the poor house  
nor the drunkard asleep in his drunkenness.

It might interest you to know,  
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the city,  
that I am the scribe of the neighborhood soundscape.

I also happen to be the close-fisted pedestrian,  
the evening paper blowing through a vacant lot  
and the crack of pavement on the iron foundry building.

I am also the little girl on the bus  
and the mumbling woman's brown paper bag.  
But don't worry, I'm not the weeds and the front yard.

You are still the weeds and the front yard.  
You will always be the weeds and the front yard,  
not to mention the amber bottle and—somehow—the malt liquor.

**West Oakland Sutra for the AK-47 Shooter at 3:00 AM**

*After "Blue Light Lounge Sutra For The Performance Poets At Harold Park Hotel"*

*by Yusef Komunyakaa*

the bang gotta be  
so loud ears can't  
hear simple prayers  
all night long casings  
clink on the pavement  
& color the street silver  
so loud fragments of gut  
& flesh cling to the plak-a-plak-plak  
you unload your magazine  
so loud windows shatter on babies  
the bang gotta be  
so loud you can expend bullets  
& not feel emptied  
till you are no more  
than an endless round of ammunitions  
on rival turf  
you load your magazine  
hold that trigger  
so loud all the dollars & drugs in this world  
can't placate your bang  
to ricochet against the concrete  
the bang gotta be  
so loud you can't  
just remove bolt and carrier  
& pack it out of sight  
crime in the city  
modern man in the firing position

you gotta get zeroed  
in on every desired range  
so loud the trigger locked  
in pull unloads like a runaway gun  
into it into it so loud  
killing is pre-conscience  
the bang gotta be hard  
killer bang to hear  
& know the adrenaline  
we are made of die young  
cause if you wanna howl  
this rifle be ready  
to let the devil use your head  
for a target

## **West Oakland Serenade**

I sing for you, Dogtown to West Grand Ave. for freeways splitting the neighborhood's sides. I sing for liquor stores, I sing for the taco truck. I sing for the summer fruit stand man.

I sing for Adeline Street tenement electrical fires. I sing for boarded up windows. I sing for charred roofless homes. I sing for diesel exhaust.

I sing for the stains on Reverend JD's T-shirt, and for the good Reverend's bowler hat too. I sing for Mrs. Ruby who for decades now has known the neighborhood boys are good.

I sing for refrigerators parked in front yards, for washing machines chillin' on the sidewalk. I sing for tireless cars raised up on wooden blocks. I sing for salvage and sculpture.

I sing for you, Dogtown, your nowhere going traintracks, your chainlink fence lined streets, your barbwire lined chain fences.

I sing for your Chinese food and donuts, I sing for your corner stores. I sing for your shopping cart pushers, I sing for scrap metal and aluminum cans.

I sing for grandfather oaks of deFremery Park. I sing for tomato vines growing in barrels, I sing for bougainvillea, for waist-high weeds and brown grass.

I sing for you, West Oakland, for your boomin systems and your Baptist churches, for your black cowboys and your Sunday barbecue.

I sing for the sugarpie lady, I sing for her curlers and slippers. I sing for the chainsmoking lady in second hand sneakers, who used to be homeless, and who now is dead.

I sing for the gunshots. I sing for the gunshots. I sing for the gunshots. I sing for the gunshots.

**(t)here**

*after bermeo, espada, y garcía lorca*

here in a city once covered with oak trees  
here in this city called oaktown  
there is a there there, we live here  
here in this city called oaktown  
a century of brick and marble hotels  
here in this city called oaktown  
where cracked cherubs hang from gold leafed ceilings  
here in this city called oaktown  
where oak tree roots crack open the pavement  
here in this city called oaktown  
brothas sit on they stoops and crack open they 40s  
here in this city called oaktown  
peace out, little sistah, be safe tonight  
here in this city called oaktown  
i stumble home with a whiskey smile  
here in this city called oaktown  
djembe funkadelic 24-7  
here in this city called oaktown  
my window rattles and shakes to the beat  
here in this city called oaktown  
the banana tree outside my window sways  
here in this city called oaktown  
capoeira on sidewalks, d'wayne's bumpin café  
here in this city called oaktown  
sweet smellin brothas rappin in french  
here in this city called oaktown  
corner store chapchae and kim bap saran wrapped  
here in this city called oaktown

wonder bread, wild turkey, olde english 800  
here in this city called oaktown  
oh, jackson street, oh new condo rising!  
here in this city called oaktown  
oh, double paned windows overlooking the lake!  
here in this city called oaktown  
oh tribune building, here where she jumped —  
here in this city called oaktown  
oh lord, she never told me her name.  
here in this city called oaktown  
oh, despair and cheap bourbon of the corner store!  
oh, oaktown, bleeding pavement and crack!  
here in our city called oaktown.

**14th & Broadway Lullaby, Oakland**

*After Anne Waldman's "& Sleep, the Lazy Owl of Night"*

& sleep, the Cleavage Lady of Night

& sleep will make you whole

& sleep, the B-Boys of the Corner

& sleep will make you bold

& sleep, the Poets in the Skids

& sleep will make you still

& sleep, my City, sleep deep

& sleep will give reprieve

(repeat)