

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Complicating Narratives of Identity, Resistance, and Survival Through Memory, Performance, and Advocacy

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Driven by the irrepressible need to assert our voice, our bodies, our politics, our cultural practices, and our pain into public, private, and academic spaces that often negate our presence and perspectives, the Chicana scholars and creative writers in this issue offer interventions that complicate and celebrate Chicana/Latina identities and experiences.

In her manuscript, “Friday Night Tacos: Exploring Midwestern Borderlands through Familial Women’s Oral Histories,” Kandace Creel Falcón examines the raced and gendered experiences of Mexican women in her family, who lived in Kansas during the 1960s and 1970s, and the food they prepared to survive and affirm their existence in the midst of hegemonic Whiteness. Through an Anzaldúan borderlands lens, Creel Falcón centers the voices of Mexican American women to theorize how they navigated a majority white space and resisted cultural loss through the creation of mouthwatering Mexican food—food they prepared to feed their families, affirm their identities, and generate a living in a town with limited economic options for Mexican working-class women. The powerful narratives of the *mujeres* in this piece are important in making visible the ways in which family serves as a site for cultural resistive practices that counter the social processes and structures of hegemonic whiteness, namely cultural imperialism, white supremacy, and

racial capitalism, in the Midwest. Creel Falcón's contributes to the growing scholarship in Chicana epistemology and is in conversation with Chicana feminist texts that theorize family memory, belonging, and identity.

For her analysis of Latina playwright Tanya Saracho's drama, "Time to Speak Out:" Toward Conocimiento in Tanya Saracho's *Kita y Fernanda*," Melissa Huerta draws on Anzaldúa's stages of *conocimiento* to map out how the female protagonists negotiate their class and racial identities as Mexican nationals in the US. Through a series of flashbacks, Saracho's characters reflect on the touchstones during their childhood that defined both their relationship and their identities as the working-class Mexican daughter of the housekeeper (Kita) and the middle-class daughter of the employers (Fernanda). Anzaldúa's *conocimiento* is a useful heuristic Huerta uses to build the case of how one of the lead characters—Kita—ruptures the class dynamics between her and Fernanda (the daughter of employers) that have shaped her experiences and sense of self. Marked by moments of discomfort, frustration, pain, and anger, Kita's understanding of the hierarchical infrastructure of social and cultural categories leads her to a *mestiza* consciousness that allow her to disavow fixed stereotypes of a Mexicana identity that fail to account for her intersectionalities and agency. Fernanda, on the other hand, struggles to decolonize the class hierarchies she has internalized as a member of the elite Mexican class and to reconcile these with the racialization she experiences in the US. Huerta proposes that Saracho's play *Kita y Fernanda* focuses on the intersections of socioeconomic class and ethnic identity, particularly Mexican and Mexican American identities, to complicate essentialized notions of these positionalities.

Adrianna M. Santos' essay, "Why Didn't Your Mother Leave?': Sexual Abuse, Storytelling, and Survival in Josie Méndez-Negrete's *Las hijas de Juan: Daughters Betrayed*," investigates the complex relationship between

survivors of gender violence and the state and offers an intersectional analysis to address the ways in which women and children, particularly those who are working-class, Spanish-speaking, and undocumented, are silenced by interlocking systems of oppression. Santos takes Méndez-Negrete's groundbreaking testimonio, as well as a personal interview with the author, to explore the power of storytelling as personal healing for survivors of sexual violence and transformational praxis in changing the culture of silence that enables violence. As such, Santos' essay serves as a feminist pedagogical intervention in shifting the dominant perspective that often blames victims of abuse, to one that situates victimization within the broader context of gender violence, structural oppression, survival, and storytelling. For Santos, Méndez-Negrete's Chicana survival narrative is a form of social-justice activism, one that translates writing in the flesh to reflexive healing and community action in addressing structural problems that stand in the way of survival, healing and justice.

As a former school principal, Maria de Lourdes Viloría offers her testimonio recounting the years she spent working with Latina/o and Chicana/o students attending school along the Texas-Mexico border and reflecting on the formative moments of her own educational journey that informed the leadership praxis she employed, which she articulates as a Chicana borderland principal leadership style. Grounded in culturally-relevant practices, culturally responsive pedagogies, cultural intuition, critical consciousness, community cultural wealth, and a culture of resistance, Viloría depicts how she put these theoretical ideals into practice, primarily by building relationships with stakeholders and encouraging them to become champions of the school's Chicana/o and Latina/o students' aspirations and racial, ethnic and cultural identity. She also contextualizes her praxis, locating her work in a state that pioneered high-stakes testing that often delimits Chicana/o and

Latina/o students' educability, in the hopes of encouraging future generations of Latina/o and Chicana/o principals to challenge deficit-based biases, misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes about Latina/o students and instead foster educational practices that increase student academic, minimize teacher attrition, and increase parental involvement.

Also, in this spring issue, we are honored to feature a reflection by celebrated Chicana feminist scholar, Chela Sandoval, regarding the trans-interpretation of her groundbreaking text, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, into *Metodología de la emancipación*. In this essay, Sandoval theorizes the meta-ideological translation method used to craft a text that retains the spirit, multi-layered meaning, and poetry of the original, but recasts the logics of power embedded in its initial Eurocentric English. As Sandoval envisions it, this decolonial project of b/order crossing, "pocha-poetics," and radical semiotics, does not end on the pages of the newly available *Metodología de la emancipación*, but continues with the readers who draw on their borderlands epistemologies, their nepantla sensibilities, and their differential consciousness to make their own meaning of the feminist liberation ethic signified by this seminal work.

The creative writing in this issue includes works in Spanish, a reflection of our commitment to "bringing in work from our complex language homes." (Trujillo, this issue). Given the legacy of anti-Spanish linguistic violence in this country, the poems in this issue speak to the urgency of including Spanish language creative writing in the face of hegemonic English, and as a way of healing from centuries of linguistic loss and uneasy attempts at recovering our linguistic expressions from a place of hope and confidence. Within this spirit of creative resistance, we've included the works of Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, writer and professor at University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Her poem, "Un día cualquiera" is a reflection on the tension of

working through the performative routine of academia, while still sustaining a life-giving energy and critical consciousness in our work as Chicana/Latina feminist scholar activists. We also feature the work of Lilian Cibils, creative writer and assistant professor at New Mexico State University. Her poems “En honor a las tierras sagradas,” “Un arrullo,” “Caracol de tierra,” “Digestión lenta,” and “In the gap,” invite us to reflect on the natural world through her image words and to create bridges between languages. For Cibils “poetry writing (and sharing) is not only a form of resistance to limited and limiting conceptualizations of knowledge creation but, mostly, a way of breathing and fully being.” (contributor bio, this issue).

Two of the four book reviews highlight scholarship that expands the field of Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies through a gendered perspective. One provides an account of the Royal Chicano Air Force, one the most influential art collectives to emerge from the Chicano Civil Rights Movement, including a critique of patriarchy that prevented Chicana members of the collective from being recognized for their contributions. The other is a critical biography that draws on Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida to make sense of the careers of four Puerto Rican female singers from the 1970s and 80s, arguing that the voice of these singers, entertainers, and public figures was rooted in—but not limited to—their gender. The other two books reviewed map out decolonial imaginings of education—*Juárez Girls Rising: Transformative Education in Times of Dystopia* by Claudia G. Cervantes-Soon—and spirituality—*Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives* by Elisa Facio and Irene Lara.

Complementing these noteworthy contributions are the paintings of Chicana artist, Ruby Chacón. A native of Salt Lake City, Utah, Chacón's roots run deep in the Rocky Mountain West, with a genealogy that ties her to the area's Indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and American legacies. It was a heritage that she did not come to fully know until after she earned her bachelor's degree in art, when she realized that narratives and images of those histories were absent from the Utah history and narrative she learned as a student and resident of the state. Her work pays tribute to the peoples who survived the colonialism, nativism, and xenophobia that stripped her family of their native language and treated them as outsiders on their ancestral lands. Her artwork featured here—a combination of majestic murals and intimate portraits—reflects her efforts to both insert the Chicana story and identity into public discourse and institutions, and to celebrate the resiliency of her people. In particular, the faces of the women she paints highlights the strength of their resilience, as well as the knowledge their bodies and spirits carry and pass on.

The manuscripts, creative pieces, book reviews, and visual art in this issue signal the interdisciplinary, intellectually rich, and socially conscious work of artists and emerging Chicana/Latina feminist scholars who are making significant contributions to their communities and the fields of education, theatre and performance, and Chicana/Latina feminist studies. We are delighted to include their work in this archive of Chicana/Latina feminist thought.