

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Epidemics and Embodied Ways of Knowing

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The precarity of our physical bodies has been laid bare since the start of the global COVID-19 pandemic. For too long, human sentience afforded us an arrogance about our place in this world. We felt quite confident in our invincibility as a species and our assumed domination over the abundance of life this planet has to offer.

A protean microscopic virus has exposed this fallacy, unjustly ravaging the most vulnerable populations, namely elderly, Black, and Brown communities. Our quest to stop the spread resulted in heightened attention to how close our bodies come in contact with each other—how our hands touch, how our breaths mingle—and how reliant we are upon these points of contact.

This hyper awareness made it inevitable to locate a through line in this issue's content related to how central our bodies are to our ways of knowing, our ways of being. Our contributors engaged how identities are sometimes legibly inscribed on our bodies and at other times not, and how we tend to adorn our bodies to signal identity.

For instance, when Tisha Marie Reichle-Aguilera read the following line in Sara Borjas's poem, "Study of a Part-Time Pocha" from her poetry collection, *Heart Like a Window, Mouth Like a Cliff* (2019)—"We fill the Dean's dinner table with our brown body. We eat the crumbs of the institution saying *mmmm* like its cake"—harkened to her own experience as a Chicana faculty member. The line in liz gonzález's poem, "Confessions of a Pseudo-Chicana,"

from her poetry collection, *Dancing in the Santa Ana Winds* (2018)—“After dancing at forty-nine Mexican weddings, I still don’t know what the lyrics to “Sabor a Mí” mean. (I can’t even speak fluent Spanglish.)”—spoke to her experiences as a light-skinned, bi-racial Chicana. In her essay in this issue, “Am I Chicana Enough?: Identity (In)security in Chicana Poetry,” she draws on Anzaldúa’s fluid concept of mestiza consciousness to analyze how both these poems problematize monolithic notions of Chicana identity, noting its relative, contingent and mutable nature, and how these poets enabled her to mollify her feelings of inadequacy as a Chicana in a non-Spanish speaking and güera body.

In the essay, “Rasquache Domesticana: Technologies of meXicana Self-Fashioning,” co-authors Sara V. Hinojos and Aída Hurtado conceptualize rasquache domesticana, a mezcla of Ybarra-Frasutro’s construct rasquachismo and Mesa-Bains’ notion of domesticana to theorize fashion created by meXicana (Hurtado and Cantu, 2020) women. The resulting aesthetic not only reflects their culture and subjectivities, it also functions to represent their intersectional positionalities, resist patriarchal limitations, connect with other women, and disrupt normative beauty standards. By showcasing personal examples of the fashion and accessories crafted by meXicanas, the authors map out the various technologies these women engage—simple modification, restructuring modifications, and professional modification—to create this subversive and radiant aesthetic, using their bodies as a canvas from which to construct, proclaim and embrace their Chicana, Mexicana, Indigenous, and Africana identities.

In her first curated creative writing section, newly-named Creative Writing Editor Dr. Grisel Acosta has carefully chosen poetry, fiction, and memoirs that accentuate various imaginaries of the body. A series of eight poems by three different poets—Elodia Esperanza Benitez, Violeta Orozco, and Dorotea Reyna—each uniquely position bodies as liberatory and wonderous

in their dynamism and resilience. In the fictional story by Vanessa E. Vega, we consider what it means to other bodies and to love othered bodies. Pico del Hierro-Villa's creative non-fiction piece explores what it means to render bodies as disposable by highlighting the violence and trauma inflicted along the U.S.-Mexico border, while Guillermina Gina Núñez-Mchiri narrates her worries about her mother, a medium whose body was ravaged by the COVID-19 virus.

Published over the last three years, the three books and one novel reviewed in this issue are masterful examples of the theoretical breadth Chicana feminist epistemologies offer, and each highlight the liberating, activist work of bodies that have been subjugated to racialized or sexualized trauma or violence. In her review of *The Chicana/o/x Dream: Hope, Resistance, and Educational Success* by Gilberto Q. Conchas and Nancy Acevedo (2020), Cynthia D. Villarreal sketches out the way the authors rely on Anzaldúan notions to map out how Chicana/o/x students can be understood as *atravesadas/os/xs* transgressing the borderlands of higher education, drawing on their facultad to traverse the institution, and ultimately, become *nepantleras/os/xs* connecting the various worlds they inhabit. The bridge-building work of first-generation Chicana/o/x college students is shouldered on their *nepantlera/o/x* bodies. C. Alejandra Elenes's review of the *Chicana M(Other)Work Anthology: Porque sin Madres no hay Revolución*, edited by Cecilia Caballero, Yvette Martínez-Vu, Judith Pérez-Torres, Michelle Téllez, and Christine Vega (2019), notes the ways this collection of testimonios recasts mothering as insurgent and collective resistance. The theorization of the terms Chicana, Mother, Other, Work and Mother-Work that gives shape to the title and the framework undergirding the anthology foregrounds a broadened understanding of mothering based on struggle, agency, and women of color subjectivities that is literally borne through multiply-positioned bodies.

The review of Manal Hamzeh's *Women Resisting Sexual Violence and the Egyptian Revolution: Arab Feminist Testimonies* (2020) by Lucinda Banegas-Carreón and Isaiás Rogel reveals the illimitable range of Chicana feminist thought. As recounted by Banegas-Carreón and Rogel, Hamzeh leans on the overlaps between Chicana testimonio and shahadat—or accounts of personal truth using Arab feminist methodology—to document the state-sanctioned sexual violence Egyptian women faced as a result of their participation in the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. This epistemological and methodological fusion, they indicate, reveals the interconnected matrix of power marginalized women are subject to, cultivates transnational solidarity and resistance, expands understandings of coloniality and fosters collaborative knowledge-making. The trauma that imperils female bodies globally is centered in this text. Another innovative application of Chicana feminist ontology is in the novel, *Luz at Midnight* by Marisol Cortez (2021). Per Cathryn Merla-Watson's review, this speculative fiction traces a budding romance between the main character, Citlali "Lali" Sánchez-O'Connor, a single mom who has returned to her hometown of San Antonio to work for a social justice organization El Centro, and Joel Champlain, a local journalist struggling with mental health issues. Drawing on a decolonial Latina feminist vision of ecology and connectedness, it weaves a bit of magical realism and critique to fashion a captivating story about love set against manifestations of and resistance to neocolonialism, neoliberalism, and capitalism, through both physical and supernatural bodies.

The art featured in this issue was created by Josie del Castillo, a native of Brownsville, Texas, who gravitates towards portraits and self-portraits in her artwork as a way to disrupt beauty norms and aesthetics that only celebrate Eurocentric features and slender bodies. She also ingeniously depicts issues of mental health through the outward appearance of the body—bodies dealing

with anxiety, trauma, and personal growth. The seven images featured here celebrate the brown female figure in all her complexity—as defiant, proud, hurting, and healing.

As you read through the pages of the most current iterations of Chicana/Latina thought, we hope its astute theoretical observations and deft turns of phrase provide some needed nourishment and rejuvenation for your overworked body and the troubled mind and anxious soul it is meant to protect.

