

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Making Our Journeys Visible and the Poetics of Social Justice

Josie Méndez-Negrete

In our poetry, our research, and our artistic expressions, Chicanas/Latinas contend with so much as they engage and document struggles of everyday life. Más Rudas, an art collective from San Antonio, Texas, in the mediums and images they employ—from photographs to film, to visual arts and installations—record those very struggles through their creative expressions. Emboldened by their ideals and in quest of making visible what we take for granted, they laud the neighborhoods and those individuals who try to humanize their communities. Images of women with faces covered in Zapatista-like headgear unite in protest for their rights. They also document the protection of animals and design visual performances to convey the myths and legends of San Antonio, bringing their art to life. Their neo-quinceañera performance is another example, when each artist rendered this rite of passage together upon turning thirty, when they could become agents of the ritual's design as an artistic performance. In their tiara-wearing best, Más Rudas challenges and contests the paths that might have been pre-disposed for them, as they take on life with a force, creating their own poetics of possibility.

Renee Beeton, Genie Canales, and Loretta L. Jones's examination of scientist identities in their article, "A Case Study: Science Identity Formation of Mexican American Females in High School Chemistry," document girls whose dreams may have been deferred in the maze of a socialization process that dictates paths they can lead, as gendered beings. In their research, the

authors explored Mexican American female high school students' "social and educational experiences in chemistry and science and their development (or rejection) of a science identity." Beeton, Canales, and Jones found that ethnic, gender, college, science, and student identities were linked to the formation of the self as a scientist. They also found that "these identities influenced how the students conceptualized their social and educational experiences in chemistry and sciences." They conclude that "having a personal connection to a successful member within a science community of practice was paramount to the young women's self-perception as potential members of the science community."

In Patricia Gonzales's "Ant Medicine: A Narrative Ecology," traditional ways of knowing provide an alternative narrative to western notions of science. She imparts knowledge about Ants as holders of knowledge and medicine, "not only as remedies but also as part of ceremonies, stories, and symbols that reflect ecological knowledge." Furthermore, she argues that "Ant knowledge emanates from a co-creative relationship in which human beings learn from the natural world and make meaning of their environment." This connection to physical and spiritual balance thus yields "instructions on communal and interconnectedness for establishing balance in the social life of human being." Our humanity and everyday interactions also emerge in the creative writing contributions.

Viktoria Valenzuela takes us on a journey to Monterey Street in San Antonio, Texas, where "the soft hiss / of trees / distract from muffled bass / below my bed. / The neighbors are oblivious / to my attempted slumber," speak not only to the personal experience and to life; her poetics emphasize not only what happens in the barrio, but also exposes the harms to those who are deported because of their statuses. "A wife loses her husband / a honey tan woman was deported / back to Juarez, Mexico." In her poetry, anti-immigration hysteria

is documented for its effects on the women and men in our communities.

“Jason took their two sons / to his mother’s house / then divorces her out of hopelessness.” Valenzuela makes a case that our concerns “are as vast as stars;” if those who would dismiss us and render us invisible would just “squint,” they would see us. Esméralda Bernal’s contributions contest the privilege of language and culture that consumes our knowledge, reducing us to spectacle or marginalia. Bernal begins, “when the word – marginalia / first slapped my ears / i ignored its stinging light.” “...i am marginalia / a note / an after thought / at the edge of their text / to be eaten and chewed / slowly / every drop / measured for surplus value.” Through discussions about place, love, or personal and cultural healing, contributors engage us in discourses about the nuances of life.

Power inequality, sexual and domestic violence, and mental illness are front center in the three monologues from *Slip of the Tongue*. Tiffany Ana López, in her introduction to the monographs, explains:

This collaborative project uses humor to stage a conversation about forms of personal and cultural violence, such as the manifestations of gender oppression, including rape; drug addiction and its impact on family and children; and the emotional and financial struggles that accompany the arduous journey to diagnose and treat bipolar disorder. The project aims to produce theater and film that explores sexuality, speaks out about matters of culture and identity, and frankly engages in other slips of the tongue.

The first excerpt, *Rocks in My Salsa*, by Cristina Nava, speaks about sexual violence, drugs, and the rape of a high school girl by an unemployed adult. “He dropped me off at my house. I stared in the mirror for a very long time. It wasn’t supposed to be that way. ‘You’re cheap.’ How embarrassing. I’m not

a puta." The complicity of silence and strict cultural mores about sexuality keep the young adolescent from talking or exposing the predator who violated her. In *Calzones Cagados*, Sara Guerrero unpacks and examines her parents' relationship, and the comings and goings of her interactions with them, as well as the tensions and manipulations that come with living between households and the respite found at her paternal abuela's. Guerrero elaborates: "While building the courage to leave the security of Abuela's bed, high beams from an oncoming car shot through the bedroom window, rolling alongside the wall. I froze in anticipation. And then they rolled away, and my heart sank." Elizabeth Isela Szekeresh, employing a cheerleading metaphor, teaches us about mental illness with a discussion about a Bipolar Type II diagnosis. She explains, "It has taken ten years to get this diagnosis. First it was depression. Then depression with ADHD, and finally bipolar disorder...." As with the two prior stories, this one imparts knowledge about the lives we enact. After teeter-totter experiences, Szekeresh grabs hold of the condition she must learn to negotiate and begins to carve relationships and partnerships with those who provide her support as she travels the path of mental illness—a very rocky road. She adds, "Getting your diagnosis is half the battle. Actually, it's a third; the other two thirds are access to a doctor and medication. Finding adequate healthcare is just as or more frustrating than the disorder itself...." I have walked this rocky path myself, as a parent of a son who lives with schizophrenia.

People assume that after twenty-one years I have learned how to deal with a son diagnosed with schizophrenia. This is, emphatically, not the case. Every time Tito has a psychotic break, the disease takes on unpredictable and complex qualities. I feel that I can never truly prepare for what will come next. Because of this ongoing sense of uncertainty, I often find myself drawn to stories like Szekeresh's, about individuals who are mentally ill—still trying to understand, to predict, and to uncover new ways of coping. I scour print and

electronic sources, looking for answers and potential cures. The case of Jared Loughner, for example, described as a mentally unstable twenty-two-year-old man, consumed me in my desire to understand and find clues or preventative measures. There are so many stories and so few answers.

Both because of these stories and the moments without them, it is hard for me to think that things will change. It has been twenty-one long years of ups and downs with countless breaks and the ever-present depression that further complicate his life. I recognize that Tito's journey is never-ending. When the medicine Tito takes for his illness no longer works, he has a setback that invariably involves re-admission to a hospital. There, in addition to examining his physical condition, psychiatrists and mental health professionals go about re-adjusting the medication so that Tito may return to the community to live his one-day-at-a-time life in hopes that the voices, hallucinations, paranoia, and depression can be controlled by the myriad pills he must take for the rest of his life—currently totaling thirty a day.

I have no choice but to be available to my son, even though more than 1,800 miles between Texas and California separate us. In addition to seeking support for him and finding the resources he needs to make ends meet, I have to serve as a case-manager-of-sorts. This means that in addition to holding those who work with him accountable, I also need to seek support of whatever type of assistance he needs to deal with his health and services he requires. It has been helpful that long ago he authorized me to be part of his team. With releases of information, I can have conversations with those who treat my son and hold them accountable when they fail to deliver services to him. And how do I support myself? Through camaraderie among those like Szekeresh, through stories that reach across miles and generations and cultural differences.

For both our sakes, I have resolved to remain healthy and to tend to myself so that I can be there for Tito when he calls, so that I am clear-headed enough to listen with an open heart. For my own mental health I turn to writing, painting, and music, along with emotional and psychological support, which allow me to cope with our lives. With age, I have become more patient and I am better able to listen to my son. So that I may help him when he needs it. With the recognition that the disease with which he deals is slippery and complex, I have to act confidently and respond firmly about each request he doles our way. But it's not always easy and I give in more than I refuse. For now, with the beginning of every new day, I must rest in the confidence that Tito has a conscience and the commitment to not hurt himself or others. Embracing my lovely Tito for all that he has given me, I hope that the atrocities that have fallen upon others do not descend upon us. Chicana/Latina resilience and creativity emerges in very subtle but impactful ways.

María Antonietta Berriozábal personifies that creativity, not only in her political and public lives, but also with the publication of her book, *María: Daughter of Immigrants*, which will be released by Wings Press in San Antonio, Texas. As the oldest daughter in her family, she established a path to education and community service. In “!Las Mujeres Valientes!” Berriozábal narrates the way in which she has worked to make visible the needs and strengths of women in San Antonio:

Latinas and their families had problems. I also saw the great talent and potential in them. The women called on tremendous resources, whether it was education, personal resources of time...a particular expertise, or leadership abilities [their actions] exhibited a track record of giving back to the community...how Latina women fared in San Antonio would determine how we all would do.

Women, mothering, change are central in Larissa M. Mercado-López's review of *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010*. Mercado-López uses the concept of transformation and consciousness to engage Moraga's notions of change in the context of Xicanismo, not only as it pertains to Chicanas/Latinas but in a global sense. She writes,

Moraga begins to see possibilities for creating change across geopolitical and generational boundaries...recognizes the epistemic significance of standing (and writing) at the junctures between generations, feminist movements, and discursive shifts in the rhetoric of nationhood and belonging; and...advance a feminist practice that is transnational and intergenerational.

Furthermore, Mercado-López concludes that Moraga offers alternatives to expand our discussions beyond established boundaries. She explains,

A Xicana Codex certainly reinvigorates discussions about feminism, sexuality, globalization, motherhood, and trans* identities in Chicana feminist studies. Moreover, it sanctions spaces in national and global discussions about these issues for Chicana feminists to occupy and to be agents of change as citizens of the United States and the world.

Notions of belonging, identity, and subjectivity frame her discussion in a review of *Reading Chican@ Like a Queer: The De-Mastery of Desire* by Sandra K. Soto. Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz writes:

For queer people of color, it is imperative to keep our queerness, our race/ethnicity, our class, our gender, and our sexuality together and at the forefront of our complex identities, especially when we

navigate cultural spaces that do not encompass us completely and furthermore prevent us from contributing to the liberation of our communities.

Soto's text focuses on the works of Cherríe Moraga, Richard Rodriguez, Ana Castillo, and Américo Paredes. She "contextualizes white queer studies alongside Chicana/o Studies highlighting the need to bring all such subjectivities together to better serve the analysis of the literature produced by queers of color in general and by Chicanas/os in particular."

In the academy, community, and society, it is imperative that we participate in the critical debates about the ways in which we are presented or represented as a people who have a complex culture and history. Just as Soto's work "enters into a theoretical and literary conversation and inscribes her text into a necessary discussion regarding the dismantling of borders around gender, genres, nations, and racial/queer subject identity/formation," so too must we challenge the cultures and practices that would misrepresent or erase our people's history.

As Book Review Editor from Fall 2008–Spring 2012, Luz Calvo, for the past four years served the journal with a strong sense of dedication. As she departs from her post, I express my appreciation for the contributions Calvo made in that capacity. She leaves us with the words of Moraga and Soto, making visible a historical trajectory of scholars and intellectuals who have unearthed and made visible narratives of and by Chicana/Latina scholars/activists. Muchas gracias y enhorabuena with your future endeavors. As you decolonize food to improve our lives, my hope is that you will continue to do your part in decolonizing knowledge.

Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas and its authors on the page aim to document and record Chicana/Latina contributions to

the creation of knowledge, making visible our expressive, narrative, and cultural practices bringing to life our ways of knowing and creating. For her contributions and her work as Lead Editor to the documentation of our creative history, I extend muchas gracias to Tiffany Ana López—scholar, creative writer, mentor, and dramaturge—who is concluding her seven years of service to the journal as co-editor. She will continue forming and shaping theater scholars with a conscience and the politics of documenting our creative knowledge. According to traditional knowledge, every seven years is a new beginning. Tiffany, it is now your time to ascend to the National Board for the knowledge you have carved and the contributions you may still make. With the history and knowledge you carry, we will seek your support and assistance along the way.