

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY:

Writing for Our Lives: Genres of Resistance

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We increasingly live in a barrage of media echo chambers, same sounding voices that bounce back to us over and over again. You can turn on the news and it sounds the same day after day. We get numb, or worse, we feel layers upon layers of attack and aggression. There are so many issues! They are so big! And diffuse! We can work and work and something comes along and knocks us down so we have to pick ourselves up, dust off and start again. We make signs. We take to the streets. We can gather and march and the laboratory in our backyard will still dump toxins into our water, or the oil company will still drill oil on sacred land, or lawmakers will strip our access to health care and reproductive rights and educational rights and citizenship rights. The lists go on.

But, in the midst of this overwhelm, we have our stories to protect and the stories that protect us. The creative writing section in this volume is dedicated to contemplating the genres that Chicana, Latina, and indigenous women use to give voice to our individual and collective struggles. The writing included in this section strives to engage community, educate and connect to lawmakers, contest scientific imperialism, and call out the white spaces where our bodies, voices, and experiences are curated, at best, and erased, at worst.

What do we do when our rights are under attack? Stand up, write back! We write forward, we write in any direction we can direct our words to change. The women in this collection have all used writing as a tool to address issues

in their communities and in greater society. The section includes new writing plus three pieces that have been previously published (see footnotes for details). Each of the different genres perform as political act. Included are an op-ed article, poetry, a testimonio, and a blog post. These selections stand alone, but as a group they allow us to reflect on the genres we use to resist and enact the languages of change.

Adriann Barboa is field director of Strong Families New Mexico (strongfamiliesmovement.org/new-mexico), a nonprofit dedicated to shifting culture and creating new policies that recognize the many kinds of families. Barboa and her colleagues use Op-Eds to frame policy discussions in community knowledge. Using Chicana community health narratives, such as the one included here of a traditional *mantanza*, Barboa grounds lawmakers and the reading public in the shared values of the *plebe* (the people) and calls on lawmakers to consider how long-standing cultural values can guide law and policymaking.

Beata Tsosie-Peña is the environmental justice program coordinator at Tewa Women United (tewawomenunited.org). For about a decade, Tsosie-Peña has been casting her words as a protective shield over her beloved community of Santa Clara Pueblo. The pueblo is downwind from the Los Alamos National Laboratory and is threatened by “legacy waste,” a term used to describe the unmitigated dumping of nuclear waste directly into ground soil and water that occurred during the early days of the laboratory. In 2010, a ten-year longitudinal study of the historical operations, the materials used and released, and their potential health risks was released. This is known as the Los Alamos Historical Document Retrieval and Assessment (LAHDRA) Report. Beata helped organize groups of people from her community and other surrounding areas to read the report and to take part in the community response period, in which people got two minutes apiece to respond to the ten-year report

written in dense scientific jargon. Living in direct contact with the waste, many community members and their families suffer from cancer, chronic illnesses, and other negative health effects. Her advocacy led to an appendix to the report with community voices, and she was also allowed to add a poem to the first page of the official report. That poem is included here, along with another piece about Pueblo people's role in the continuing fight against environmental racism.

Speaking out from personal experience with the intention of collective healing is a thread through all of the works. As the next author in the section, Shantel Martinez exclaims, "I am a testimonialista. [...] I am here to disrupt articulations of our presumed 'place' both inside and outside of the academy." Martinez writes about how she is frequently mistaken as "the help" (nannies, janitors, retail associates, housekeepers, etc.) and through the genre of testimonio flips the script on "capitalist institutions that execute a 'violence of value' that promotes a devaluing of labor as well as a divide in communities of color." From this position, she enacts an embodied rhetoric to name violence without apology.

At the core of the issues that we advocate for and advocate against, we operate in and for Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's bodies. As we move from the reflection on how we, as individuals, negotiate predominantly white spaces in these bodies, the next author, Cecilia Caballero, encourages us to consider what it means to mother in all-white spaces. Caballero is the mother of a seven-year-old boy, Alonzo, who was born during her time as an undergraduate student. Cecilia was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area to low-income, formerly undocumented immigrant parents from Michoacan, Mexico. Currently, she is a PhD Candidate in the Department of American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California. She is one of five mother-scholars who identify as Chicana-Indigena, Chicana/Xicana/Latina and Afro-Chicana who

created the cyberspace, Chicana M(other) Work (chicanamotherwork.com). Along with her colleagues, Caballero uses new media: websites, blogs, and podcasts to critically examine new interpretations of motherwork informed by specific gendered, classed, and racialized experiences.

Finally, the section is framed with healing poems to help center us in reflecting on the women who came before us, who prepared us for this fight, and for the generations who continue to come through us and for whom we fight. May the words of all the women in this section inspire us to not only write creatively, but also to be creative in how we use our writing. My mentor, Sonia Saldívar-Hull, always said that Chicanas put literature to work, and all the women included here are a testament to that. I hope you enjoy reading this section as much as I did. For the days that our victories feel small, know that you have a power circle of women writing alongside you for change. With each pen stroke or each word typed, we are writing for our lives.