

LAHDRA INTRODUCTION¹

Beata Tsoie-Peña

Growing up I was disconnected

Some things were not discussed

Among people who valued hard work and employment

One-sided silence through years of schooling

I learned about the nuclear age

From movies and propaganda and Bradbury field trips

The glorified versions of a history that happened in my own backyard

In our state of enchantment

Pristine open spaces and a population

Not respected by a higher nation

Still living off the land as the industrial age passed them by

Only to get thrust into nuclear realization

Beneath a mission

Urgent and thick with intensity

Beneath a shroud of secrecy

I was not yet born

The day scientists feared for our sky

Thoughts of atmospheric ignition

And that everyone would die

I was not yet born when the Jemez was taken

Homesteaders relocated, not of their volition

Uranium miners on the road to perdition

Beloved mountains, occupied before I could praise them
Disconnected from ancestral knowledge
In three generations

Clan animals vanished
Even as the jobs began to appear
Unprotected hired hands from the valley
A job was nothing to fear
It was a welcome exchange in hard times

I wasn't yet born
The day silver ash rained down for days
And a plume of poison drifted over state lines
Radioactive fallout, on cisterns of drinking water
On crops and livestock, who all miscarried that year

The people were lied to
And went about life as usual
While the truth fled
With bread over their mouths
To keep from breathing air they knew was foul
And the world was changed forever
A month later, 80,000 people were killed instantly
Justified atrocity named, "enemy"
And the book was closed on Trinity

Even though it was our own citizens who were bombed
Children born into an experimental population
With a cancer rate way higher than the average nation

Entire families still sick and dying
Still crying, for the elders and children they lost too soon

I was born into military healthcare, mixed blood and desert beauty
Free from the shame of colonized blame
My grandfather employed by Sandia
My down-winder grandmothers who birthed babies and taught me songs
While washing tainted laundry and making pots from local clay

I wonder now, can earth decay?
Eating the elk my uncles brought down
Breathing fire smoke from trees that drank
From discarded waste placed . . . anyplace

Today my daughters are born
Into single-driver-car twice daily parades
Dependence on industrial weapon economic charades
The sound of bombs exploding
As we pray towards the sun in mornings
Will my cornmeal prayers
Protect them as they play in ditches
Carrying water from a source three miles away from tritium releases?

What did my oldest get exposed to?
As I breathed in smoke from a tech area burned three times over
What kind of poison
Can penetrate the walls of my womb?

What stories were silenced, and why and from whom?

The truth must be told
 From the people who lived it
 Who dwell in this place that houses our spirit
 Respectfully, I pray, for past, present and future souls to be at peace someday
 For clean earth, air and water
 So my children can play

Splashing and laughing as we tend to our gardens
 Beneath the loving gaze of our sacred mountains
 Free of fear from invisible poison
 Free to hear, undisturbed and clear, the birds sing in the morning
 As we continue to question
 And speak our points of view
 Let us share the stories anew that have never been told
 And release this pain not even a century old

No longer shamed by accusations of ignorance
 Let our diverse voices be our deliverance
 No breath here is unimportant
 We are free to pray
 Each in our way
 For justice, strong leaders, and supportive institutions
 A foundation for our expectations
 As we welcome in this time of healing
 For the good, of all generations

Notes

¹ Dedicated to the women of Las Mujeres Hablan, and those working for justice in their communities, with special thanks to Tina Cordova of the Tularosa Basin Downwinders Consortium narrative campaign used to communicate with legislators.