

“There is no despair in consciencia, but it is a hard road.”

—Cherríe Moraga, “Café con Cherríe”

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

The Time In-Between

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Welcome to the speculative reality of 2020 where we all collectively cringe when we hear anyone utter the words, “What else could happen?” We’ve all heard of speculative fiction, but 2020 insists that we grapple with many of the very scenarios we’ve been speculating about. 2020’s world is one in which it seems we could not make up the events we have been facing: global pandemic, gross negligence of federal elected officials, the amazing people power of localities, the continued killing of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color through state sanctioned violence, the uprising against those killings and the on-going protests across the country that insist on dismantling systems designed to kill/imprison/trap Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in cycles of oppression. We have witnessed the social determinants of health become evident and embodied before our eyes as the COVID-19 virus hit Indigenous nations, Black, Latina/o/x, and immigrant communities. We have watched the most economically vulnerable workers—many of them our own familias—rightfully being recognized as the country’s essential workers while unjustly remaining underpaid, undervalued, and forced to the frontline. At the same time, the one percent has monetized the fear and grief we are all feeling; meanwhile there are murder hornets threatening to invade, the American West is on fire and birds are dropping dead from the sky in the thousands. Oh, and I just heard something about a meteor hurtling towards

earth.

Since our last issue, we've all been through a lot. (That's literally the understatement of the century. L-i-t-e-r-a-l-l-y!) The commentary for this section has been so hard to write. I started and stopped writing it at least half a dozen times. There is another version that is a poem, another a twelve-page stream of consciousness scrawl in my journal, and the notes I am currently utilizing are jotted down on a deck of index cards. I keep telling myself there is a way to tie everything we are experiencing into a tidy metaphor. I've racked my brain and cannot find one, and that is why I am so thankful to the contributors to the Fall 2020 creative writing section. In a time that seems so impossible to describe or, to paraphrase Anzaldúa, impossible to find the right words to use as handles so we can pick up and carry what we are experiencing through literature, our contributors have done just that. The authors featured in this section have provided us what feel like healing incantations to ward off the dangers, or, at the very least, to protect parts of our hearts and souls during this time.

In this in-between time—as the Chicano poet Israel Haros Lopez has marked through a numbered series of poems called “The Time In-Between”—we are all marking time in new and innovative ways.

Nobody knew this was time was going to happen
 Or that my voice would shift to poetry
 We were all wandering around in the time before
 Drinking our cafecitos and laughing with friends
 Making love tangles as we danced and worked
 And yelled and whispered and spoke truths
 In the meetings we dreaded but now miss,
 In the beds we loved now our offices,

Around the wild bonfires born of pitch-dark nights
Just as we were getting going
Ground to a halt by a molecule in a protein coat
Too small to be seen but certainly felt
The virus settles in the living cells of a host
And started a new clock we don't know how to read
Yet
This is the time in-between
Certainly, some of us have been ready
MALCistas are built for interstitial time
Don't viruses know that we are tired
Asked one too many times to make space
For unwelcome guests in our homes and bodies
Grrrrl, welcome to the third space
We've been here! Waiting. Planning our approach.
All that reading. All that writing.
All the conference talks and lectures.
We open arms and make offerings:
Smoke and water and holy dirt and cornmeal.
We don't need clocks, we read Nepantla.
Our grandmothers, mamas and tías prepared
But who could expect attacks on all fronts?
The birds are falling out of the sky
A flash cold knocked them out
A venting of radiation from Los Alamos National Labs didn't help
And smoke from the ignited forests catch in their throats
Carrying the collective sadness
The birds are telling us

Pray to your cells
 Tell them thank you
 You will soon feel better
 I appreciate all you do for me
 If you leave, please come back
 As tea leaves or a baby koala
 Now that you are invaded
 As you have invaded us
 Pray to your cells
 The birds tell us
 As they take their last breath
 And drop to the ground

In this volume's creative writing section, we begin with a poem of the moment, "Realm Shift," by the noted educational scholar, Dr. Laura Rendón. In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., I saw this poem flash across my Facebook feed and I found respite here. In the newness of our epidemic context, an academic elder sent out word that helped reframe the moment from a Chicana feminist perspective. As we were being whipped into a media frenzy about the virus, Rendón offered an alternate vision of this shared experience. She proclaimed that this is a moment where "We find ourselves at the verge/ Of spaciousness—expanded possibilities" (154). And it helped me remember our tools as Chicanas/xs, Latinas/xs, Indígenas, and Afro-Latinas/xs, that we can use our facultad (Anzaldúa) and our sentipensante (Rendón) reasoning to help us through this moment and as we invent the new future.

Set in the context of racialized violence of many types, is it any surprise that part of the work we must do is about reckoning with our own histories? In the poem, "A Chicana Prayer," the author, Paula García imagines a healing

dialogue between the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico and her Spanish/Mexican/mixed race ancestors. This poem was posted on Facebook on the 340th commemoration of the Pueblo Indian Revolt of 1680, considered by many as the first *American* Revolution. During this act of rebellion, the Pueblos collectively organized an attack that drove the Spanish settlers back to northern Mexico. It was the first thing I read on August 10, 2020, and it was in the spirit of the message carriers from 340 years ago that I watched García's poem go viral in New Mexico circles. In a time of so much sickness, it was as if this poem proclaimed that it is never too late to address the original wounds that continue to impact our communities.

In a similar manner to García's reflections, the editors of *Chicana Latina Studies* dialogued and asked each other questions about creating healing spaces for voices that continue to be underrepresented in our communities and in the academy in the wake of the George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery murders. We started to ask ourselves questions about the home we've built in *Chicana Latina Studies*. In addition to a renewed commitment to thinking about how we create a shared sense of belonging for Chicanas/xs, Latinas/xs, Indígenas, and Afro-Latinas/xs, we made our first act to put out a call for submissions by Afro-Latinas/xs and about Afro-Latinidades in our collective experiences. What came from this call was an amazing grouping of writing that will be shared through this section, some by women who identify as Afro-Latina/x and other writings by non-Black Latinas/xs reflecting on the history and culture of Afro-Latindad in their communities.

We begin by considering the intimacies of our own homes in "Prieta" by Fabiola Bagula, where sisters are pitted against each other by their grandmother's colorist gaze. The author opens the curtains to her own familial interactions and demonstrates the ways anti-Black colorism seeps through the generations,

until it doesn't. The powerful conclusion to this testimonio helps us all consider what our responsibilities are to addressing racism in our families.

From Bagula's brave reflection on home, we move into a grouping of poems by Elizabeth Pérez whose observations about the diverse communities—including the inbetweenness of Havana and Miami, light skin and darkened skinned, healthy/ill—and the individual relationships that animate these spaces render complexity in her sparse lines. The architecture of these poems invite us into the deep contemplations of the narrator, guiding us through a new and planned perspective. From reframing a curatorial choice in a public space to looking through family photo albums, Pérez reminds us how the mundane daily experiences can cement themselves into beliefs which we must be willing to question. Through these divine poems, we are reminded, while riding on the bus with the narrator, that through the contradictions "We may yet get where we're going" (173).

The last two pieces came separately but like the Afro-Latina/o/x music that they celebrate, come together in a pair that dance in sync with one another. First, in the short essay, "Capullo y Sorullo," Reid Gómez invites us to jam with her as we read. Really, there are YouTube links in the footnotes to listen to as you come to understand that this is a testimonio given in cumbia. The author explains that music welcomed her into the Spanish language, helped her address linguistic shame, and helped her to "live in music, in the house that language built." Following this essay is a mixed-genre piece, part song lyrics, part testimonio, part recording entitled, "Agua de esclavo" by Ginger "Dizzy" Jenkins. This piece also includes a sonic experience, a recording of the song, written in the Afro Boricua tradition of Bomba. This folkloric genre has historically been dominated by men. According to Jenkins, Puerto Rican women in the San Francisco Bay Area engage in bomba as drummers, composers, and primos as a form of resistance. In describing her work, she

asserts, “I wrote this song from the perspective of a Black Boricua woman who surfs. Surfing has typically been a space dominated by white men. My presence in the water as a Black woman is both healing and revolution.” What both these pieces demonstrate is that music is an instrumental part of healing from the erasures of colonization and cis/hetero/patriarchy, and reclaiming our voices.

... I thought I was done.

And the evening after I turned in my section, Ruth Bader Ginsberg passed away. The notices started popping up on my social media feeds and with each post, my chest tightened. Sadness. Fear. Anger. All the emotions were collectively flooding us. A group of women I know hopped into a Zoom meeting and just cried together for the imperfect jurist who dedicated her life to gender justice. Later that night, a poem, “The Week Ruth Bader Ginsberg Died” by noted Chicana poet Lorna Dee Cervantes came up on my feed. Each stanza spoke to our shared context and the tenor of the moment, but then came the relief and reminder, “Now I have rights. Rights we fought for,/and birthed, and we’re NEVER going back.” I contacted Cervantes and she generously let us publish her poem, a needed punctuation mark on the fall 2020 creative writing section. *Mil gracias, maestra.* Thank you for your words.

As I type these last paragraphs, I am simultaneously in a Zoom board meeting and a Zoom work meeting. One is on audio on my phone and the other has sub-captions on my iPad. I keep moving my eyes from the computer screen where I am typing, to the iPad where everyone else in a prominent organization are on video and dressed in business attire with words running across them. I am muted, off camera and wearing Snoopy pajamas. The cadence of Robert’s Rules of Order keeps playing on a loop from the phone audio. I just try to keep track of when I have to press my “thumbs up” button

to vote. My home altar is in my line of sight, and the single candle I keep lit is glowing. We must hold each other through this. I think of the parents homeschooling their children in the chaos of the moment.

Putting this section together has been a real effort in consciencia, but like Cherríe Moraga recently said during a virtual cafecito hosted by Otter Cross Cultural Center and the Otter Student Union at California State University, Monterey Bay (Sept. 18, 2020), there is no despair here. What I realized in the writing of this commentary and framing of the work of the powerful writers included here is that *2020 is the metaphor*—we are defining and living it. I speculate that in the future we'll refer to the clusterpuffs of life as, "Ala! That's real 2020!" Or, "Dang, I really 2020-ed that!" We don't have to know all the answers as we are experiencing these in-between times, but that's kinda the point. Be gentle with yourselves. In case no one has told you, you are doing an amazing job. Ten cuidado, mujeres/mujerxs.

We are accepting applications and nominations (you can nominate yourself) for the position of Creative Writing Editor. This is five-year commitment starting fall 2021. Please check the journal's website for more details.