Res Rhetorica

ISSN: 2392-3113

Retoryka granic
Rhetoric of the Borders

12 (3) 2025

ISSUE EDITORS: ANNA BENDRAT, ELŻBIETA PAWLAK-HEJNO

EWELINA BAŃKA

THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN, POLAND

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5143-7147

ebanka@kul.pl

LAW-Defense at the border: Margo Tamez's rhetorics of survivance
LAW-Defense na granicy: retoryka przetrwania Margo Tamez

Abstract

The article analyzes Margo Tamez's artistic, scholarly, and activist work as a decolonial practice of *truthing* that aims at dismantling contemporary discourses of nation- and border-building as part of rhetorical imperialism that legitimizes the colonially-rooted ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples in the name of the safety and sovereignty of a settler colonial nation-state. I argue that Tamez's work, be it in the form of the written text, the spoken word, or performance, should be seen as a site of rhetorical power aimed at identifying and confronting the forces that have framed the Lipan Apache people as walled-in and thus non-existent in the state-engineered discourses of border and nation security.

Artykuł ukazuje artystyczną, naukową i aktywistyczną działalność Margo Tamez jako dekolonialną praktykę „ukazywania prawdy". Ma ona na celu demontaż współczesnych dyskursów narodowych w USA dotyczących obrony granic i ich mieszkańców, ukazując je jako przykład retorycznego imperializmu, który legitymizuje ucisk rdzennych ludności w imię bezpieczeństwa i suwerenności kraju. Praca Tamez, czy to w formie tekstu pisanego, słowa mówionego, czy performansu, powinna być postrzegana jako przykład retoryki przetrwania demaskującej i kontestującej mechanizmy wymazywania obecności plemienia Apaczów Lipan zarówno z granic, jak i historii narodu amerykańskiego.

Key words

Margo Tamez, LAW-Defense, Lipan Apache, US-Mexico border wall, Big Water Country, rhetoric of resistance
Margo Tamez, LAW-Defense, Apacze Lipan, granica meksykańsko-amerykańska, Kraj Wielkiej Wody, retoryka przetrwania

License

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 international (CC BY 4.0).
The content of the license is available at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Received: 3 July 2025 | Accepted: 2 August 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.29107/rr2025.3.7

EWELINA BAŃKA
THE JOHN PAUL II CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF LUBLIN, POLAND
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5143-7147
ebanka@kul.pl

LAW-Defense at the border: Margo Tamez's rhetorics of survivance

> It is time for a radical rethinking of indigenous anticolonial movements along and traversing U.S. borders as a key nexus where indigenous revolutionary consciousness, resistances to state violence, and reclamations of indigenous rights are reshaping the governance of lands, territories, and communities (Tamez 2012, 58).
>
> The *Ndé isdzáné* praxis provides for our community and our peoples the structures needed to restore and strengthen anticolonial collective-rights movements to disrupt and halt U.S. white--supremacist hegemony and invasion into our territories (Tamez 2010, 562).

1. Introduction

Shortly after his inauguration as the 47th President of the United States, Donald Trump officially declared a national emergency at the southern border, thereby enabling the continuation of the US-Mexico border wall construction. Trump's rhetoric in the inaugural address was characterized by an overly aggressive and militarized stance, framing immigration as a "disastrous invasion" posing a war-like threat to national security and public order. The intentionally overdramatic declaration to return "millions and millions of criminal aliens back to the places from which they came" (Trump 2025) justified the immediately--to-be-implemented, widely media-covered agenda of rapid deportations, arrests in sensitive community locations, family separations, denials of asylum rights, and the expansion of detention camps. Unsurprisingly, Trump's border rhetoric deliberately stokes anti-immigrant sentiments, fueling the fear of the "criminal alien" in order to legitimize further border wall construction, state surveillance, and the militarization of the border regions.[1] The state-choreographed approval of

1. Karma Chávez (2012, 49) observes that the discourse surrounding national security – a parlance of America's current daily life – is deliberately closely linked with the War on Terror, drug trafficking, and the invasion of illegal aliens "so that militarization of regions of the US-Mexico border seems natural and warranted in order to protect citizens from these supposed threats."

the wall as a "world-class security system" (Freking and Spagat 2019), coupled with the alienization of migrants and border crossers, becomes, in turn, an effective tool for producing what Robert DeChaine (2012, 8) describes as "an ethnonationalist form of civic identity – a way of seeing, experiencing, and distinguishing between the true American and the illegal Outsider that is 'made real' through the authority and control of the US state."[2]

The controversial methods used in the detention and deportation of migrants encompass not only militarized tactics and violations of civil rights but also racial and ethnic profiling. Considerable evidence shows that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Border Patrol officers have disproportionately focused on people of color, especially those of Latin American and Caribbean backgrounds. Although these profiling practices are officially described as race-neutral, they effectively criminalize immigrants and residents of border areas based on the visible traits associated with foreignness, such as skin tone and ethnicity. Not surprisingly, over recent months, there have also been reports of members of Indigenous tribal nations, especially those living in the US-Mexico border areas, being harassed, arrested, and unjustly detained by ICE and Border Patrol solely due to their appearance.

Covering these controversies by various media outlets has offered the general public a more nuanced view of the colonially-rooted misconceptions of Indigenousness as essentially non-American and of the systemic nature of the problem regarding the state's abuse of Indigenous peoples' civil rights and citizenship status. However, despite the media's recent interest in the violation of Indigenous peoples' rights in the context of intensified ICE and Border Patrol arrests, there is still a conspicuous lack of attention given to the circumstances faced by the tribal communities living in the US-Mexico border region. For years, their criticism voiced against the state's systemic abuse of power has been ignored, silenced, or deliberately removed from public view. Nevertheless, Indigenous communities remain resilient in their anti-border activism, utilizing various platforms to speak out against land dispossession and the processes of bordering and othering.

One of the Indigenous communities that continuously opposes border politics in the Texas-Mexico region is the Lipan Apache Band of Texas. A leader of the anti-border movement, a poet, herstorian, and Indigenous justice advocate, Margo Tamez has for years openly spoken out against the systemic violence inflicted on the Lipan Apache / Ndé Dene peoples, whose original homeland territory

2. Many critics have already argued that, incessantly stressed by the state officials, the necessity to secure the nation against the illegal, criminal alien in reality "obfuscate[s] symbolic and material violences committed against migrants and bordered others in the name of state and conservative appeals to safety, privacy, and the Global War on Terror" (DeChaine 2012, 10).

encompasses the areas in Texas and northeastern Mexico. Tamez's artistic, scholarly, and activist work represents what she describes as a decolonial practice of *truthing*. It aims at unmasking and dismantling contemporary discourses of nation- and border-building as part of rhetorical imperialism that legitimizes colonially-rooted ongoing oppression of Indigenous peoples in the name of the safety and sovereignty of a settler colonial nation-state.

Tamez's oeuvre is vast and complex, including non-fiction and poetry collections, *Alleys and Allies* (1990), *Naked Wanting* (2003), *Raven Eye* (2007), *Father | Genocide* (2021), volumes of scholarly work, artistic projects, and activist work for various local, national, and international organizations documenting and protecting human rights across the Americas. However, due to constraints related to the length of this article, the analysis will focus mainly on her multifaceted work which intensified after the passage of the Secure Fence Act in 2006,[3] especially her activism for the Lipan Apache Women Defense (LAW-Defense) organization, as a response to the construction of the border wall in the Texas-Mexico region, known to the Lipan Apache as the Big Water Country. I will examine Tamez's writing, the practice of community-building and knowledge-sharing, as well as her use of local, national, and international media platforms to contest the state--legitimized processes of bordering and militarizing the US-Mexico region and Indigenous rights violations in the border(ed) area. I argue that this work, be it in the form of the written text, the spoken word, or performance, should be seen as a site of rhetorical power aimed at identifying and confronting the forces that have framed Ndé Dene peoples as walled-in and thus non-existent in the state--engineered discourses of border and nation security. Drawing on the theories of rhetorical sovereignty grounded in Indigenous systems of knowledge, I will analyze Tamez's anti-border work, done with and alongside her border(ed) community, as a rhetorical practice expressed in the *landguage*[4] of dissident *truthing* that aims to ensure Ndé Dene peoples' healing, empowerment, and eventual self-determination.

2. Reclaiming the voice and the story: Indigenous rhetorics of survivance

In his seminal essay "Man Made of Words," Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday highlights the significance of storytelling, emphasizing that language and imagination

3. As Tamez emphasizes, since the document came into force, Indigenous communities have fought with the state to defend their rights to the lands bifurcated by the border, as the Act legitimizes the establishment of operational control over the international US borders. More specifically, it supports the use of reinforced fencing, surveillance technology, and trained personnel to control and prevent "all unlawful entries into the United States, including entries by terrorists, other unlawful aliens, instruments of terrorism, narcotics, and other contraband" (United States Congress, *Secure Fence Act of 2006*).

4. Coined by Tamez, the term "landguage" refers to a linguistic and pictographic form of expression. It reflects Tamez's blending of language and land, underlining the inseparability of Indigenous identity and territory, especially in the context of the history of Ndé Dene peoples whose lands are divided by the US-Mexico border. For more information, see: Margo Tamez, "Father | Genocide," https://www.margotamez.com/fathergenocide.

lie at the core of how Indigenous peoples understand and represent themselves. As he (1979, 167) asserts, "[w]e are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are." Referring to the history of Indigenous peoples' resistance to the destructive forces of settler colonialism, Momaday explains that storytelling helped communities confront and, therefore, withstand the inflicted violence. By weaving recollections of colonial oppression into their oral traditions, Indigenous peoples not only adapted and reinterpreted these experiences but also transformed them into a reflection of their collective identity. In this manner, the act of narrative creation served as a source of strength, enabling people to speak out, confront, and contest threats to their tribal existence.

Momaday's celebration of Indigenous peoples' right to self-expression as a form of cultural continuance highlights an important aspect of Indigenous peoples' centuries-long struggle to reclaim and maintain their sovereignty. Ojibwa/Mdewakanton Dakota critic Scott Richard Lyons (2000) argues that, for colonized peoples, sovereignty is primarily the guiding principle in their struggle for self-determination, as manifested in their protection of traditional homelands, cultures, traditions, languages, and self-respect. It is "the beacon by which [they] seek the paths to agency and power and community renewal" (Lyons 2000, 449). This struggle, Lyons (2000, 449-450) adds, must also involve the pursuit of rhetorical sovereignty, that is, Indigenous peoples' inherent right "to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse."[5] It is not without reason that rhetorical sovereignty remains such an important aspect of Indigenous experience, as it represents a centuries-long active resistance to the destructive consequences of rhetorical imperialism used by settler colonial powers to maintain control over the Indigenous world. By rhetorical imperialism, Lyons understands the dominant group's ability to use their power to establish authority over others by determining the framework for debates. What is crucial is that the terms of debates "are often definitional – that is, they identify the parties discussed by describing them in certain ways" (Lyons 2000, 452).

When analyzing the fundamental element of the colonial discourses that shaped the New World, namely the dichotomy of us/civilized versus them/savage, the guiding principle that emerges from the narratives of that time is the use of what Stephen Riggins (1997, 1) defines as "the rhetoric of othering." It is a discursive

5. As Lisa King (2015, 26) argues, "[r]hetorical sovereignty directly addresses the language, rhetoric, and representations concerning Native peoples and wishes to place more of the control over that language and rhetoric – and therefore control over the representation and the images derived from them, and therefore the policy and action derived from those – in Native nations' hands." As she stresses, "To claim rhetorical sovereignty is to claim the right to determine communicative need and the right to participate in the process of public image making and meaning making" (2015, 26).

process whereby groups or individuals are framed as fundamentally different and separate from a dominant "self" group, often to justify exclusion or marginalization. Using precisely this strategy, the colonial discourse of nation-building created the figure of the Indian. As Ojibwe writer and literary critic Gerald Vizenor (1999, 85) argues, the Indian is a colonial invention that originated in the white man's fantasies of the "discoverable other" and which was eventually "simulated to be an absence" in the history of the progressively civilized world.[6] Denying Indigenous survivance, the settler colonial nation created itself by "call[ing] themselves *Natives*. (. . .) They invented everything. / The patented history" (Tamez 2021, 67). Indeed, as Malea Powell[7] (2020, 402) aptly observes, according to the logic of rhetorical imperialism, "'[t]he Indian' (whatever that may be) must disappear so that 'America' can live."

Contesting the colonial rhetoric of the white man's "Indian," Gerald Vizenor (2009) celebrates Indigenous peoples' artistic and scholarly productions, describing them as *narratives of survivance* – the rhetorical expressions of an ongoing process through which Indigenous people assert their presence, cultural vitality, and resistance to colonial domination and victimization. Vizenor (2009, 138) argues that Indigenous peoples' resilient acknowledgment of the continuance of their world should not be described in terms of mere survival, which implies a passive awaiting for the violence to end, but as survivance –"an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion in history." As Vizenor (1978) emphasizes, framed as the "vanished Indians," and therefore non-existent in the colonially-rooted discourses of power, Indigenous peoples have always responded, using their voices as weapons – the "wordarrows"[8] – to reclaim their inherent rights to exercise self-determination and claim their world anew.[9] Doing so, they have simultaneously realized the vision that Momaday (1979, 167) presented in his aforementioned essay: "Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are."

3. Naming the enemy: truthing about the border wall

In her analysis of Indigenous women's writing and social justice activism, Yaqui/Chicana critic Elizabeth Archuleta (2006) argues that the intellectual traditions created by women's lived experiences within their communities are

6. Vizenor (2009, 18) adds that the Indian as a construct continues to exist in modern times as an archive of "simulations, discoveries, treaties, documents of ancestry, comparative traditions in translations, museum remains, and the aesthetics of victimry," continuously exploited to legitimize the discourses of progress and civilization.
7. Powell is a mixed-blood of Indiana Miami, Eastern Shawnee, and Euroamerican ancestry.
8. The word comes from the title of Gerald Vizenor's book *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade* (1978).
9. Drawing on Vizenor's work, Melea Powell (2002, 399) aptly states that through their rhetorical practices that defy colonially rooted discourses of power, Indigenous peoples change their "object-status within colonial discourse into a subject-status, a presence instead of absence."

forms of rhetorical practices that aim at ensuring the continuance of the Indigenous world. These practices, Archuleta continues, are characterized by building kinship bonds and promoting responsible and compassionate living, communal healing, and future-oriented empowerment. Exploring Indigenous women's strategies of challenging various forms of oppression and injustice, Archuleta celebrates their creative reappropriations of the "enemy's language"[10] and writing traditions. As the critic claims, by doing so, Indigenous women not only produce critical knowledge but also refuse to be non-recognized by demanding their visibility and securing the position of power necessary to perform their work:

> When Indigenous women speak out against oppression and become visible we politicize our continued existence and signal to the United States, Canada, Australia, and other colonized nations that assimilation or continued threats of violence have not worked despite more than five hundred years of trying to erase, ignore, or keep us silent (Archuleta 2006, 92).

Archuleta points to the act of "naming the enemy," thus identifying, examining critically, and then confronting the sources of oppression, as a crucial stage in women's rhetorical practices of healing and empowerment. Her use of the phrase "naming the enemy" is not accidental, as it refers to war metaphors that are present in Indigenous women's work. As she (2006, 93) explains, "[c]haracterizing lived experiences through metaphors of invasion and attack and using the language of war and colonization provides a model for Indigenous women to reflect on their peoples' ongoing struggles with the United States." Additionally, used by Indigenous women in their works, war metaphors – the Vizenorian wordarrows – have a political function, implying "that enemies with battle plans and strategies for victory must exist" (Archuleta 2006, 93). Paula Gunn Allen's (Laguna Pueblo) words, to which Archuleta refers in her analysis, aptly summarize the argument: "Certainly war has been the major motif of Indian life over the past five centuries, so it is perfectly fitting that we write out of our experience as women at war, women who endure during wartime, women who spend each day aware that we live in a war zone" (1989, 18).

For Lipan Apache women and their communities living in the region divided by the Texas-Mexico border, Paula Gunn Allen's words are reality. The border wall, a mega project cutting across Ndé Dene peoples' homelands and private properties, is a daily reminder of their being controlled by the state-scripted discourse of the War on Terror, drugs, and illegal immigration, turning the Big Water Country into a "militia-based, masculine-dominated, industrial capitalist 'disposal' of Lipan

10. The phrase "reinventing the enemy's language" comes from the title of the anthology edited by Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America* (1997). In the book, the writers emphasize the importance of creative reappropriations of the languages of the colonizers by the colonized people in reclaiming and asserting their rights to self-determination.

Apaches" (Tamez 2010, 564). Witnessing their people being exposed to "state--terror," Margo Tamez and her mother, Eloisa García Tamez, "named the enemy" and went to war, *truthing*, that is, "speaking, telling, writing what [was] directly observed (. . .) to make meaning where there [was] little reliability upon official and sanctioned facts and definitions" of the state's blatant violations of Lipan Apache rights and being (Tamez 2021, 224). Their legal battle with the state, as well as their activist work for the Lipan Apache Women Defense organization, became their rhetorical practice by which they refused to be silenced and erased, like the Vizenorian "Indian-absence," from the history of the region via the discourses of border and nation security. Their *truthing* not only presented the border wall as part of a repetitive system and structure of the state's genocidal violence against the Lipan Apache and their right to self-determination, but also evidenced that borders are products of discourses and can "travel beyond their literal locations, mapping onto the bodies and identities" of those who cross or are crossed by them (DeChaine 2012, 9-10).

4. The rhetorics of LAW-Defense against American fatherlands

> When we went to war
>
> we sheltered children women elders knowledge keepers
> we shielded Kónítsaįįgokíyąą
> belonging to us.
> When we went to war
> we guarded
> we asserted Kónítsaįįgokíyąą laws
> belonging to us.
> When we went to war
> we informed them to follow house rules
> we insisted on respect. Matriarchal laws
> belonging to us (Tamez 2021, 59).

Tamez's poem "When We Went to War" from her 2021 collection titled *Father | Genocide* stands as an accurate description of her dissident response to the US government's violation of Lipan Apache peoples' sovereignty by the forceful installation of the border wall in Kónítsaįįgokíyąą – their homeland territory – that took place in 2007. More specifically, the wall was to be erected on Eloisa García Tamez's private property in El Calaboz – a small ranchería adjacent to the Río Grande. In her many testimonies that document Ndé Dene peoples' dissident struggle against the border, Tamez (2010, 559) stresses that "[w]hat followed became an intensely fought battle for self-determination and autonomy of indigenous women's societies

and the renewal of a long historical pattern of Ndé women facing down an empire on the grounds of indigenous rights."

When the U.S. Customs Border Patrol agents and representatives of the Department of Homeland Security began persuading landowners from the Lower Rio Grande region, many of whom were members of the federally nonrecognized Lipan Apache Band of Texas, to waive their lands for the construction of the border, Eloisa García Tamez became one of the most harassed individuals. The acts of intimidation and harassment were directly connected with her adamant refusal to give her land away, defending the Crown Land Grant title that her ancestors acquired during the Spanish colonization period. With her unyielding resistance to protect her land and constitutional rights, García Tamez demonstrated not only her objection to state-supported land theft and border wall construction but also to the forced assimilationist rhetoric of the necessity to secure the border against the politically constructed "other" – the nation's enemy. Securing the nation-state equaled the simultaneous denial of the inherent rights that the Lipan Apache had to their lands and self-determination. García Tamez's act of disobedience challenged the authoritative discourse which, to quote Mikhail Bakhtin (1981, 342), "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own." For Eloisa García Tamez, it meant accepting the walled-in reality as the status quo. As Margo Tamez (2021, 213) states, agreeing to the terms of the Department of Homeland Security would equal accepting life behind the "walls – physical, systemic, oppressive – which weaponize separation and empty human beings deemed unworthy of the authority of being." With her bold stance, the mother refused to be "incarcerated" and erased by rhetorical imperialism.

With threats and harassment increasing, and more individuals feeling disoriented, helpless, invisible, and unable to defend their rights against the government forces, Margo Tamez and Eloisa García Tamez co-founded the Lipan Apache Women Defense (LAW-Defense) organization that became instrumental in the women's anti-border resistance, especially in their legal battles with the government that took place between 2007 and 2009. The organization began its work by gathering members of the Lipan Apache community as well as individuals and organizations ready to offer support. Using digital platforms, LAW-Defense defined and communicated its main goals to the public:

> The Lipan Apache Peoples and allies of El Calaboz Rancheria in south Texas organized in the summer of 2007 to address centuries and recent decades of land-based struggles, recognition, territories, and self-determination at the U.S.-Mexico border areas.
>
> Lipan Apache Women Defense (LAW-Defense) is an Indigenous Peoples'-based organization. It supports local capacity building, documentation, research, and investigations related to Indigenous peoples' rights affirmed in the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

> LAW-Defense documents and advocates for the rights of the indigenous originarios, Ndé/ Lipan Apache peoples who are the Real People: original rancheria communities along the Rio Grande/ Rio Bravo (https://lipancommunitydefense.wordpress.com/about/).[11]

How the organization was founded and how it operates is crucial for understanding Lipan Apache women's rhetorical practices of open resistance, healing, and empowerment. Grounded in the matrilineal and matriarchal experience-based systems of knowledge, with women playing central roles in community leadership, LAW-Defense directly refers to the predominantly matrilineal, matrifocal, and matrilocal worldviews and social structures cherished traditionally by Indigenous peoples inhabiting the Big Water Country. As Tamez (2010, 560) claims:

> In our home communities, we position ourselves first and foremost with respect to *Nde´ isdzáné* and *Isdzan shimaa* – very roughly translated as "the People-Women" and "Woman Earth," respectively – which automatically implies the close and extended family, clans, kinship, and relationships that include a strong intergenerational and kin network concern about all human beings and our mental, physical, and spiritual wellness.[12]

Focused on strengthening kinship bonds and building a transborder "kin network," the organization provides direct support to the most affected community members, also addressing urgent transborder demands regarding humanitarian crises such as child detention at the border or gendered and racialized violence stemming from increased militarization of the border and state occupation. In the Indigenous Peoples-based approach, LAW-Defense refers to a traditional system of governance which, as Lyons (2000, 456) argues, is primarily a "holistic people-oriented" practice.[13] As the critic argues, in the traditional Indigenous worldview, "a people" means a group

> united together by history, language, culture, some combination therein – a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of the people itself. It has always been from an understanding of themselves as a people that Indian groups have constructed themselves as a nation (Lyons 2000, 454).

11. In 2013, the organization decided to improve and expand its digital presence and activism. To do so, it built a new website: https://lipancommunitydefense.wordpress.com/. However, all the information stored on the original website is still available to the public: https://lipanapachecommunitydefense.blogspot.com/. During the years of the Tamez women's legal battle with the government, the organization was also quite active on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/LipanDefense/. Margo Tamez continues her work, using various digital platforms. For more information, see, for example: https://www.margotamez.com/, https://margotamez.wordpress.com/, https://blogs.ubc.ca/mtamez/, http://www.colectivasos.com/en/integrantes/margo-tamez/.

12. As Tamez (2010, 560) adds, "Indigenous women's traditional roles as key decision makers and as stewards of water, lands, minerals, botanicals, textiles, agronomy, family wellness, and selection of leaders have an ancient foundation in the region."

13. In their analysis of the concept of peoplehood in traditional Indigenous worldviews, Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle (1984, 8) point to the religious origins of the idea of the people: "[W]ith most American Indian tribes it begins somewhere in the primordial mists. In that time the people were gathered together but did not yet see themselves as a distinct people. A holy man had a dream or a vision; quasi-mythological figures of cosmic importance revealed themselves, or in some other manner the people were instructed. They were given ceremonies and rituals that enabled them to find their place on the continent."

A matriarchal microstructure of a larger "nation-people," LAW-Defense stands in stark opposition to the patriarchal structure of a nation-state whose power it openly contests. The first structure, centered on the importance of Kónítsaįįgokíyąą – the motherland, peoplehood, relationality, and interdependence – operates based on horizontal, solidary relationships and the language of compassion and inclusivity that transcends the geopolitically established borders. The latter, on the other hand, is grounded on the ideals of "American Fatherlands" and nationhood, prioritizing the politically granted citizenship and vertical, hierarchical power relationships established discursively within the borders of a nation-state (Tamez 2021, 77).

Moreover, advocating for the rights of the "originarios," "the Real People" of the land, LAW-Defense claims and affirms the inherent right of the Lipan Apache and other Indigenous peoples of the area to their ancestral lands. Doing so, the organization challenges the notions of citizenship and tribal status, tools of rhetorical imperialism that keep Indigenous peoples in the position of subjects whose sovereignty and existence as a people depend on the decision of the external political entity. As Lyons (2000, 452) argues, the United States "assume[s] a position of political paternalism over Indian nations that has thrived up to this very day – chalk one up for the 'Great White Father.' The lesson here seems obvious: namely, he who sets the terms sets the limits." Challenging the state's power over Ndé Dene peoples, LAW-Defense reclaims a bond with the land by centering on the kinship relationship grounded in memory and lived experiences in the Big Water Country. As Tamez (2021, 93) reiterates in the poem "Horse People:"

> Some of us belong in spaces and kinships
> complicating Americans' understanding of place,
> nation, peoplehood, heritage, ancestry, national languages,
> territory, family, family cemeteries, family history law,
> governance, and jurisdictions.
>
> Horse is our kin.
>
> There is no border no fortress no distance no obstacle
> too great to ensure one's kin
> will thrive and expand.

As the poem explicates, Ndé Dene peoples do not derive their identity, a sense of belonging, and sovereignty from a federally granted and legally confirmed status but from the imaginative stories and the *landguage* that continuously bond them with the motherland: "Ndé homeland connotes a spirit, memory, story--filled embodied territory with a detailed oral, remembered and written record of ancestral belonging, presence, and resistances to occupation and destruction" (Tamez 2016, 7-8).

Tamez's choice of words – the originarios, the Real People, Ndé Dene – used not only on the organization's website but in her artistic work, official writing, and reports prepared for legal cases and UN forums, points to yet another crucial issue that she continuously addresses, namely the racially based violence and marginalization of Ndé Dene peoples. Inhabitants of the Big Water Country that spans the area of what is now the Lower Rio Grande region in Texas and the territory of northeastern Mexico, Ndé Dene peoples are often racially profiled as Mexicans, the "villainous, dark-skinned, non-English-speaking (. . .) nation" (Tamez 2008, 118). Identified as the Indigenous Mexican "other," the Lipan Apache become "both 'foreign' and 'enemy,'" thus alienated and erased from their lands (Tamez 2008, 118). Robert DeChaine (2012, 8) emphasizes that this violent border rhetoric, which continues to shape the socio-political and cultural environments in the United States,

> [reaches] back to the founding of the nation. Anti-immigrant sentiment, rooted in nativism and materialized in processes of racialization, has long influenced US public attitudes toward migrants and other border crossing subjects (. . .) Along with its racist and nativist underpinnings, the alienization of border(ed) subjects is also predicated on a state-directed discourse of migrant illegality, a mode of subjectivity that constructs the 'illegal alien' as one who is by nature out of place, a problem, and a threat to the national body.

It is, therefore, crucial for Lipan Apache peoples to practice "decolonial disruptions" of state discourses of nation and citizenship not only to demand to be identified according to tribal laws but also to expect the respectful acknowledgement of their historically documented presence in the region and, consequently, their inherent rights to the land (Hass 2015, 192).

The intentional misrepresentation and silencing of Lipan Apache peoples' demands for self-recognition and self-determination were obvious after Eloisa García Tamez lost her federal lawsuit in 2009 and was forced to accept financial compensation for the land taken away for the construction of the border wall. The loss did not deter the Lipan Apache women, as they continued their fight through activism and international human rights mechanisms. Margo Tamez became the spokesperson for her Ndé community. Interestingly, during the legal battles conducted between 2009 and 2012, she experienced criticism from Indigenous rights experts and state officials. As she reports, when preparing materials for the legal cases as well as for the United Nations Indigenous forums, she was advised to rethink her sharp criticism of historical erasures of Lipan Apache peoples from the region and "to 'mellow' the message, homogenize the Ndé standpoint and collapse it into 'border peoples,' collapse Ndé colonial history into 'border histories,' and reduce Lipan Apache to a generic/universal U.S.-Mexican history" (Tamez, 2021, 223–24). Without a doubt, as Tamez (2021, 224) points out, the attempts

to silence the People-Women law-defenders and to censor their *truthing* prove that rhetorical imperialism "extend[s] into the highest stages of international law."[14] As Tamez (2021, 225) claims, although created to protect constitutionally--guaranteed human rights, many law institutions participate in denialism which offers "||||Sovereignty||||XXXX|||| [that is] so very empty||||SOVERYEMPTY|||| woked||||we are woked||||it is soveryempty|||they got nothing for us||||except|||| THE DUNGEON||||."

An interesting example of Tamez's embodied practice of dissident truthing in a public forum was her participation in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights /Organization of American States in October 2008. During the event, Tamez wore a home-made traditional Apache dress. The dress, whose origin dates to the 19th century, is generally seen as a symbol of Apache resilience and cultural continuance. However, as Tamez (2021, 227) states, during her presentation, the dress gained a new meaning, embodying the experience of Ndé Dene peoples being walled-in and incarcerated in El Calaboz: "The dress drew the lens to a different Ndé subjectivity; a federally nonrecognized Apache; a Ndé dispossession refuser on an international stage, confronting the U.S. government." Wearing the Apache dress, Tamez, on the one hand, appeared "intelligible" to the general audience familiar with the popular mainstream Apache imagery. Yet, she simultaneously subverted the all-too-comfortable image of the Apache Indian as she spoke out about contemporary dispossession and violation of the Ndé world by wearing a dress whose "disturbing origin [Tamez traced] among Ndé women held in nineteenth-century prisoner-of-war camps" (Tamez 2021, 227).

Faced with censorship, silencing, and intimidation, coupled with systematic surveillance of the organization's leaders by Border Patrol agents, LAW-Defense intensified strategies of knowledge and skills sharing to educate members of the community about the importance of protecting and affirming Lipan Apache visibility, especially in the context of genocide and historical erasures of Ndé Dene peoples in the region. Tamez led the process of producing documentation and media that would serve as knowledge necessary to develop critical methodologies to analyze the Indigenous experience of living in walled-in zones of conflict.

14. Although Margo Tamez was not a direct litigant in the lawsuits against Michael Chertoff, who held the position of U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security at the time, she still acted on behalf of her mother and the Lipan Apache Band of Texas in their legal disputes with Chertoff. However, since 2007, Tamez has been actively engaged with various United Nations bodies, including the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNEMRIP), the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Human Rights Committee (CCPR). Her advocacy primarily focused on issues concerning land dispossession, the militarization of border areas, and human rights violations, particularly affecting Indigenous communities living along the US-Mexico border. In 2012, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights invited Tamez to present her research at the 5th Session of EMRIP, held in Geneva, Switzerland from July 9 to 13, where she discussed the consequences of border militarization and land dispossession for Indigenous peoples in the Texas-Mexico borderland region.

Among the materials collected and stored on LAW-Defense websites and on--site archives are a) photographs and video recordings of the process of border building, with instances of the violations of citizen rights by state officials and Border Patrol agents, b) documentation of legal trials organized by Eloisa García Tamez and her allies, c) Margo Tamez's reports prepared for different UN bodies with which she collaborated, d) press articles and interviews, and e) testimonies offered by community members that would not only provide information about the current situation of the Lipan Apache tribe, their history, culture, and traditions, but of historical events that helped to link contemporary forms of injustice with the historical ones. Documenting the Ndé perspective on their struggle for sovereignty on unceded lands, the complex archive of Ndé narratives of survivance has become a site of rhetorical empowerment and continuous healing, grounded in transborder kinship bonds, trust, compassion, and shared skills and knowledge about strategies of protecting Indigenous rights and visibility. As Tamez (2021, 43) declares:

We've hammered	Google juice	like shots	to build up	digital fortitude.	
We don't want digital sobriety		on this next	little journey	to the land.	
A decade	dug in	we're plugged in			
we're	the lightning cord				
	we've jackedlegged	a toolshed			
	we've gearheads	exhuming			
bitter storms	bitter lands (. . .)				
We are	the earth lodge	memory	truthing	what happened.	

Indigenous People- and place-oriented, the work of LAW-Defense becomes therefore an interesting example of a decolonial rhetorical practice, defined by Cherokee two-spirit writer and activist Qwo-Li Driskill as a "skillshare." According to the author (2015, 63-64), a skillshare is "a process of collaborative labor that answers community needs;" it centers on activist and pedagogical concerns of Indigenous peoples and "focuses on teaching and disseminating specific embodied practices (. . .) that continue cultural memories. Decolonial skillshares have intentional and specific goals to heal historical trauma, resist colonization, and continue our traditions." As Driskill emphasizes, a skillshare aims to use the knowledge produced through scholarship and disseminate it outside of the academy, empowering Indigenous peoples and their decolonial struggles.

While the knowledge produced during the years of the organization's most intensive activity has been gathered and systematized by Margo Tamez in her scholarly work, it has never been taken away from the community. On the contrary, it continues to be disseminated by Tamez in the form of poetry, scholarship, activism, and artistic performance. All these forms of expression have served

Tamez and her mother as tools in their decolonial practice of *truthing*. As Tamez (2021, 215) admits, over the years, her multifaceted work has "taught [her] about the importance, yet limitations, of legal briefs, reports, and papers if these are not deployed into the intertextual domain to voice dissent at impunity." Although LAW-Defense is no longer as active as during the time of border wall construction, it continues to impact the reality of the Lipan Apache community in the Big Water Country.

5. Conclusion

Even though 16 years have passed since the 18-foot border wall was erected on Eloisa García Tamez's land in El Calaboz – and despite the increasing militarization of the Texas-Mexico border area – the Lipan Apache People-Women continue their LAW-Defense agenda of "naming the enemy" and dissident *truthing*. While Eloisa García Tamez remains in the river-hugging El Calaboz Ranchería, Margo Tamez currently lives in Canada, on the traditional lands of the Syilx Indigenous people. The legacy of their work devoted to the protection of Ndé lands and sovereignty in the Texas-Mexico border region is undisputed. The knowledge created during the most active years of the LAW-Defense organization has served as a foundation for Tamez's ongoing scholarly, artistic, and activist work – her narratives of survivance. Expanding her work beyond the borders of the Big Water Country, Tames continues to apply the principles that guide the LAW-Defense organization, forging new kin networks and alliances with Indigenous women scholars, artists, and activists from various communities in the US and Canada to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples as well as the communities affected by international borders. Her most recent publication, *Gathering Together, We Decide: Archives of Dispossession, Resistance, and Memory in Ndé Homelands* (2025), co-edited with Cynthia Bejarano and Jeff Shepherd, is a testimony to Lipan Apache women's survivance and their unyielding practice of rhetorical sovereignty, aiming at healing and empowering the Ndé world. Documenting Ndé resistance to the border wall, militarization, dispossession, historical erasures, and the ongoing racially-based violence in the Texas-Mexico border region, the book is an important contribution to the criticism of the processes of bordering and othering that are grounded in the discourses of nation and border security. It is also an example of women-led dissident acts of solidarity focused on community--building and knowledge-sharing – the counterforces to the current state-sponsored anti-immigrant border rhetoric.

Like her mother, Margo Tamez assumes the position of "the woman at war," leading her people on the path of empowerment. As she (2021, 211) claims:

> As we witness, we know more, we know more deeply, and we contribute to documenting these processes; but we are also co-creating a new structure for remembering and an oral history of being and asking for future generations. We build knowledge on interstitial being and asking about root causes, affect and effect, to support and seek relief for Indigenous relatives who are in pain and in a fight for their dignity. We witness the stories of those we respect, stories that are like digging tools, breaking through the sod of excessive abuses, disrespect, and vile treatment by powerful individuals and groups. We bear witness to continually threatened lives under dire conditions. We recognize in our relationality with those in the carceral state that we also witness a mirroring in pieces and fragments, our deepest self, some of us also intergenerational genocide survivors.

Following the footsteps of the People-Women, the original protectors of Ndé law and community, Margo Tamez continues her dissident *truthing* about the borders that have walled-in Ndé Dene peoples. Her work, like the stories of a former Ndé prisoner of war, Augustina Zuazua, is a site of rhetorical resistance, ensuring that "Ndé homelands stay alive" in the Lipan Apache narratives of survivance (Tamez 2021, 69).

References

Archuleta, Elizabeth. 2006. "'I Give You Back': Indigenous Women Writing to Survive." *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 18 (4): 88-114., https://www.jstor.org/stable/20737352

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. "Discourse in the Novel." In *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist, 259-422. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barker, Joanne. 2005. "For Whom Sovereignty Matters." In *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestations and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination*, ed. Joanne Barker, 1-32. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Chávez, Karma R. 2012. "Border Interventions: The Need to Shift from a Rhetoric of Security to a Rhetoric of Militarization." In *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*, ed. D. Robert DeChaine, 48-64. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

DeChaine, D. Robert. 2012. "Introduction For Rhetorical Border Studies." In *Border Rhetorics: Citizenship and Identity on the US-Mexico Frontier*, ed. D. Robert DeChaine, 1-18. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.

Deloria, Vine Jr. and **Clifford M. Lytle.** 1984. *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Driskill, Qwo-Li. 2015. "Decolonial Skillshakers: Indigenous Rhetorics as Radical Practice." In *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*, eds. Lisa King, Rose Gubele, Joyce Rain Anderson, 57-78. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Freking Kevin and **Elliot Spagat.** "Trump calls new border wall a 'world-class security system.'" Accessed May 5, 2025. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-trump-calls-new-border-wall-a-world-class-security-system

Gunn Allen, Paula. 1989. *Spider Woman's Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Hass, Angela. 2015. "Toward a Decolonial Digital and Visual American Indian Rhetorics Pedagogy." In *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*, eds. Lisa King, Rose Gubele, Joyce Rain Anderson, 188-208. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Harjo, Joy and **Gloria Bird, eds.** 1997. *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*. New York: W. W. Norton.

King, Lisa. 2015. "Sovereignty, Rhetorical Sovereignty, and Representation. Keywords for Teaching Indigenous Texts." In *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching American Indian Rhetorics*, eds. Lisa King, Rose Gubele, Joyce Rain Anderson, 17-34. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Lipan Apache Women Defense, Accessed 15 June, 2025. https://lipancommunityde fense.wordpress.com/about.

Lyons, Scott Richard. 2000. "Rhetorical Sovereignty: What Do American Indians Want From Writing?" *College Composition and Communication* 51 (3): 447-68. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/358744.

Momaday, N. Scott. 1979. "The Man Made of Words." *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature*, ed. Geary Hobson, 162-174. Albuquerque: Red Earth Press.

Powell, Malea. 2002. "Rhetorics of Survivance: How American Indians Use Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 53 (3): 396-434. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1512132

Riggins, Stephen Harold. 1997. "The Rhetoric of Othering." In *The Language and Politics of Exclusion: Others in Discourse*, ed. Stephen Harold Riggins, 1-30. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

United States Congress. *"Secure Fence Act of 2006." Public Law 109-367. 26 Oct. 2006. U.S. Government Publishing Office.* Accessed May 10, 2025. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-109publ367/html/PLAW-109publ367.htm.

Tamez, Margo. 2021. *Father | Genocide*. New York: Turtle Point Press.

Tamez, Margo. 2016. "Indigenous Women's Rivered Refusals in El Calaboz." *Diálogo* 19 (1): 7-21.

Tamez, Margo. 2010. "Restoring Lipan Apache Women's Laws, Lands, and Strength in El Calaboz Ranchería at the Texas-Mexico Border." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 35 (3): 558-69.

Tamez, Margo. 2008. "Space, Position, and Imperialism." *Chicana/ Latina Studies* 7 (2): 112-121.

Tamez, Margo. 2021. "SOVERYEMPTY narrative DeneNdé poetics |||| in |||| walled |||| home |||| lands |||." In *Indigenous Women and Violence: Feminist Activist Research in Heightened States of Injustice*, eds. Lynn Stephen and Shanon Speed, 209-242. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.

Tamez, Margo. 2012. "The Texas-Mexico Border Wall and Ndé Memory Confronting Genocide and State Criminality, beyond the Guise of 'Impunity.'" In *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*, edited by Jenna M. Loyd, Matt Michelson, and Andrew Burridge. 57-73. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Trump, Donald. 2025. "The Inaugural Address" Transcript. *Whitehouse.gov.* Accessed January 20, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/remarks/2025/01/the-inaugural-address/.

Vizenor, Gerald. 2009. *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survival*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Vizenor, Gerald and **Robert, A. Lee.** 1999. *Postindian Conversations*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Vizenor, Gerald. 1978. *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Wieser, Kimberly G. 2017. *Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and Literacies in American Indian Studies*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.