

Chapter 3

An Open Letter to #MyGlobalFamily from Dre Abeita, a Pueblo Coyote and Modern Day Superhero/Revolutionary



Dre Abeita, University of New Mexico

Who Am I?

I am Dre

I am the Isleta princess, the last pueblo unicorn
A general at war against poverty, coloniality, and dehumanization
My tongue, my wit, my life, a blade that cuts lies
I know monsters, but fear none because I am Gammy's granddaughter
From moccasins, from Dr. Pepper, and mercurochrome
A child of sacrifice, empire, and violence
I am from the forgotten Rez, harsh, loving, and bittersweet
From Indian bread straight from the horno, sunrises over the Sandias
From beat-up pickup trucks, a Dartmouth degree, and scabbed knees
A Native superhero, a modern-day trickster
I am Coyote's child, beware my teeth
One who travels upside, downside, sideways, backwards and forward
Walking in all worlds, with hope, love and joy

An Open Letter to #MyGlobalFamily from Dre Abeita, a Pueblo Coyote and Modern-Day Superhero/Revolutionary

Dear #MyGlobalFamily,

COVID-19 doused my already precariously balanced world with gasoline and lit a match. It activated a permanent fight mode, frequently triggers my PTSD, exacerbates my anxiety/depression, and forced me to seize humanizing but panic-stricken survival strategies or risk devastating consequences. Frustrated, emotionally driven and bordering on desperate, but tempered with great hope, I appeal to you, #myglobalfamily. Together, we acknowledge that our entire world and our families are forever altered by this historic trauma. Due to globalization, no matter one's locale, we are in this together. As Americans and responsible global citizens, we can no longer afford to think about ourselves as individuals, benefiting from a dehu-

manizing colonial empire, but rather as part of a greater whole. With the future of our global family on the line, I seek your love, empathy, and patience, while asking for your help in creating a reality in which my community and family, as people of color, have true equality on par with my community and family, who are White.

But first, introductions, I, Dre Abeita, stand before you, a veteran leader of my Pueblo people. I walk with Coyote and embody the hope of my ancestors. I am the granddaughter of Miguelita Histia and the great-great-granddaughter of Pablo Abeita. Like Indigenous Ohkay Owingeh revolutionary Popé, I am a general in the never-ending conflict against the tyranny of the American empire, White supremacy, coloniality, and the ramifications of capitalism as modern-day slavery. I am a modern-day superhero/revolutionary (in memory of Fred Hampton). My unique positionality as a Native (Isleta), cis-gender female, bisexual, trauma survivor, medical marijuana cardholder and PTSD-diagnosed activist/researcher/educator and my work as a critical race theory, Whiteness, and intersectional scholar make me a formidable activist. However, my most important role is as an aunty of twenty-one hopeful Black, Brown, Asian and White nieces and nephews through my sisters-and-brothers-of-my-heart in New Mexico, Arizona, California, Maryland, Texas, Montana, Washington, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and Madagascar. But even an aunty—who is Coyote and a revolutionary superhero, with a huge global family—has her limits.

I'm honestly afraid I'm killing myself slowly through stress, overwork, and anxiety. I can't stop myself from being physically sick. I've lost and gained over twenty pounds in the last few months. Some days, I find myself showering multiple times to calm my anxiety enough to continue to fight, work, and survive. I'm stuck in permanent crisis mode with no relief. I don't want to die early, but how does one avoid being swallowed whole by the overwhelming stress. Dare I stop to breathe? Who do I put down? Who do I say no to? Two sets of elderly parents whose shopping we do? The three households, including my nephews and two fellow students who are experiencing hardship whom we support with groceries every two weeks? Do I drop the game-changing \$200 sent monthly to Indonesia to help my sister who lost her lecturer position (monthly contracted at \$170)? Can I afford to when her 18-month son is currently ill, and they are expecting their second child? Do I say no to my former students who have been emailing, calling, and texting me? Do I tell my community members who reach out because I share my own experience with PTSD, anxiety, depression, trauma, and suicide, that I'm too busy? Hell-No!! That's not who I am. I'm a fighter. I'm the realist who cries with you, the trickster Coyote who makes you laugh, the warrior that defends and protects, and the eternal optimist that gives you hope. But I need your help so I can sleep again and restore my dwindling faith in the impossible dream of equality for people of color.

I've been treading in deep waters since Friday, March 13, 2020, and I'm afraid of drowning. I can't let anyone or anything slip through the cracks, but it feels like only a matter of time. In addition to COVID-19 devastating our people through high infection and mortality rates, we also face increasing police brutality, racism, and violence. Rayshard Brooks, Michael Brown, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless others have become our literal martyrs, as mass protesters take to the

streets by the thousands. Our communities of color cry out for justice and demand that our lives be counted as worth protecting. #BlackLivesMatter is our battle cry as we combat the violence of police brutality, the mobilization of the National Guard against our people, and the violence of #AllLivesMatter. Our modern American colonial empire built through the enslavement and subjugation of our communities of color continues to demand the blood of my people. Our physical chains were removed only to be replaced with ideological ones, in the form of damaging and violent false ideologies like bootstrapping, meritocracy, and the unattainable American Dream. How do we survive these endless onslaughts of violence on our communities? How can we keep our families safe?

I'm terrified for my Malagasy nephews, who are attending the local university. The Lutheran House, where they call home, is blocks away from the recent weekly protests where police violence regularly occurs. Every week, during our grocery runs, family dinners (takeout picnics with social distancing), or Zoom calls, I remind them to be careful. In just a few months, we went from discussing drinking and STDs to masks and police violence. Now, I cover interactions with the police and say things like, "I don't want you to get shot because you're Black." I am so bitter, heartbroken, frustrated, scared and in fight-mode right now. I just want to wrap them up and keep them safe, but at 19 and 20 years old, they prefer their freedom.

My brilliant, funny, and loving nephews believe that getting an American undergraduate degree is vital to their future success. Both of them talk about applying to graduate school, traveling the world, and becoming our future leaders. After graduation, they will be reunited with my sister and the rest of our family in Madagascar and have ambitions of making their mark in the world. As I witness my nephews developing into amazing young men, I can't help but channel some of their enthusiasm. Despite the uncertainty that we face, our children remain optimistic about their hopes and dreams.

All my nieces and nephews worldwide are relying on the widely held belief that we, as adults, have the ability to secure their futures. I'm asking you to make this belief a reality. Stand with me and add your voice to our collective demand for survival. My original theory, Walking as Coyote, calls for ordinary people to stand forth and become extraordinary. It asks that we step forward as communities of color and White allies to become leaders who model humanizing practices. Our survival depends upon our ability to reimagine ourselves as superheroes/leaders, not through the lens of empire, capitalism, coloniality and White supremacy, but rather through Pueblo superheroes, like Coyote.

As Coyote, I am a role model for Indigenous youth and highlight that our own culture, languages, and traditional stories are valid sources of knowledge. By refusing to remain silent regarding our harsh lived realities, we collectively declare the experiences of people of color as valid and demand that our unique concerns be addressed. Together, we can combat the historically constructed harmful ideologies of what education and academia are "supposed to be" and reimagine tools that can revolutionize our society. We do not need Batman to save us; we need to save ourselves and be our own real-life superheroes.

My superheroes are members of #myglobalfamily, who are individually impacting our communities and whose direct everyday interactions ensure our very survival. For example, earlier this year, my sister, Rijaso Andriamanana Josoa, Ph.D., was briefly appointed the Minister of Education for Madagascar. She literally transformed the landscape of education for her entire country, no matter how brief. My other superhero is my sister, Neritza, soon-to-be Dr. Díaz-Cruz, a Puerto Rican researcher/educator/revolutionary. She is a lifeline and tireless advocate for hundreds of students of color in her Arizona-based charter high school. Both of my amazing sisters embody what it means to be a superhero/leader. They are literally transforming the world through education via their direct everyday actions. My sisters inspire hope and remind me that we are never alone, but rather that we are part of a greater global family.

My optimism grows because all over America, all over the globe, people are waking from their state of false consciousness. They are realizing that our society is not as stable, glorious, equitable or as colorblind as we believe. Our reality is that one's lived experience is heavily defined by racism and depending on the depth of your pocketbook, you can literally buy a better life. American society has proven that money can buy you a designer baby, a lifesaving organ transplant, an Ivy League education, or even allow you to get away with murder. In the case of the Texan, Ethan Couch, with enough money, one can buy and pay for a brand-new medical diagnosis. Couch's family hired a medical expert who diagnosed him with influenza. For a price, this newly created medical diagnosis became a bought and paid for legal strategy, effectively turning four counts of murder into lighter charges of manslaughter. The only catch is that one must be willing to exchange hard cold cash for the lives of four non-rich but innocent people.

We live in a world where our youth have media-centered role models like the Kardashians, Disney pop stars, and Donald Trump. We are actively creating a society of meanness, god-like status, and gluttonous consumption. Our celebrities tell us to consume more, care less, and continue to reify wealth, beauty and popularity. Until recently, the current President of the United States was a celebrity millionaire who yelled, "You're fired!" on a reality TV show. The supposed leader of the free world now communicates through Twitter, has to be constantly fact-checked, and continues to hold rallies after being elected. These unnecessary and ego-driven mass gatherings continue to endanger American lives and the violence that has followed is a stark reminder of Hitler's Nazi rallies during World War II. This is #notnormal and history is clear that any rise in white supremacist groups, totalitarian dictatorships, and targeted attacks on civil liberties indicate a crisis for communities of color.

COVID-19 has exacerbated our society's historically constructed inequity due to the record-breaking unemployment rates, various economic crises and or/ crashes of the stock market, loss of housing, food insecurity, illness, and unprecedented rates of death in the United States. Having only 4.25% of the world's population but almost 25% of the global deaths is a genocide of epic proportions.

I worry that our country is choosing money over the safety and lives of our people. Reopening our states, schools, and businesses will result in thousands, and over time, millions of deaths. We do not have a cure. We do not know enough about how

it transmits, its side effects, or how it affects certain at-risk groups. My Diné sister-in-law is an MD at our university hospital, and my aunty, who is 65, was called back as an MD to the hotspot Tuba City on the Navajo reservation. We have a high number of family members who are frontline healthcare workers. My sister-in-law has already prepared us for when, not if, we lose a family member due to exhaustion and exposure. I hope and pray that we all make it safely, but all the unknowns and lack of federal government response combined with the cowboy mentality of survival being based on the morality of your individual state's governor has me up at night.

Our country and our people are dying because instead of creating a New Deal/ jobs program, mailing tax-free monthly stipends, suspending all debt payments, or giving us healthcare, our corporate politicians decided to throw money at the stock market and to support corporate welfare. Our leaders are pushing people to go back to work instead of providing authentic solutions as a modern-day form of capitalist genocide. Having such a high national mortality rate is terrifying and our federal government's lack of response is criminal and endangers all our lives.

As an elected student leader, graduate student, and tuition-paying concerned community member, I ask our leaders to put our students' lives before profits. Anything more than one student present is too many. It is unethical for massive educational institutions to even consider returning to face-to-face classes before a vaccine. As both a student and part-time adjunct professor, I do not want to go back to campus. We know that the virus can be transmitted through HVAC systems and that interactions resulting in longer than five minutes with an infected person will dramatically increase risk. Do we really want to reopen our K-12 and higher education institutions for the sake of profit and normalcy? The harsh reality is that if we go back to face-to-face instruction before there is a vaccine, then we will have more deaths. Some institutions are offering smaller classes. But in reality, who is going to sanitize the rooms? The professor? The staff? The students? How about masking? Do we mask for the entire three-hour sessions for graduate classes? I get lightheaded after 20 minutes of grocery shopping. Are we really ready to go back to "normal" in a #notnormalnewreality?

In the last two months, we mourned the loss of six close family members in #myglobalfamily. Additionally, I have sisters-and-brothers-of-my heart who have experienced hardships because they live in Indonesia, Madagascar, Iran, New York City, San Diego, El Paso, or Phoenix. Some cities and countries still cannot get supplies. In Albuquerque, we are privileged due to being located on I-25 and I-40. Why do you think we have toilet paper already? Three months into a global crisis and everything is back in stores as if things were normal? That in itself is not normal. Our ability to return to consumerism so quickly is a mark of our empire and should be troubling for everyone. Especially after several countries, and even states have accused the Trump administration of stealing their much-needed medical supplies. Who is going without, so that Americans can pretend normalcy while shopping at Walmart and stocking up on bleach and wet wipes?

We have a global pandemic to negotiate with no vaccine in sight and little or no federal support or plan to "save" us. I do not trust my university to protect my life in this dangerous and unknown situation. I do not want them to have the power to

require me to risk my life to attend class, nor do I want my fellow students to be cut off from employment or the ability to graduate. As million- and billion-dollar institutions of learning, I expect more from our colleges and universities. We need solutions that preserve life, not risk it for the sake of money, capitalism, or normalcy.

Despite the harrowing reality of the last few months, and the uncertain future that we collectively face, I remain the eternal optimist and look forward to facing these challenges with you, #myglobalfamily. I pledge to be there alongside our brothers and sisters for every step of the journey. United as modern-day superheroes and revolutionaries bound together by love and driven by the hope of our children, we become invincible.

-Dre Abeita, a Pueblo Coyote and Modern-Day Superhero/Revolutionary

Chapter 4

Invisibility: Academic Stopwatches, Mothers' Labor, and the Global Pandemic

Christy Wessel Powell, Purdue University and Helen C. Bentley, Purdue University

We coauthors, Helen and Christy, are at precarious points along our academic career trajectories: Helen is a dissertating doctoral student, and Christy is pre-tenure faculty. Christy serves on Helen's dissertation committee. We are also mothers of young children: Helen has three and Christy has two, respectively, under age 9. We chronicle our experience during the pandemic to suggest transformation necessary to support early academics/motherscholars at this unprecedented time.

The pandemic's timing impacted our careers significantly. Our respective positions in the academy are measured by an invisible stopwatch. Christy is keenly aware of having three more years until materials are reviewed for promotion with tenure to associate professor. Knowing this deadline looms, she intends to publish, not perish, which necessitates keeping track of manuscripts at different stages, from collecting data to final publication. Likewise, Helen must fulfill her requirements within the graduate school's time frame. But more importantly, she wishes to defend in Fall 2020 to take advantage of current job options. COVID-19 unexpectedly disrupted our time-bound plans.

Just as the invisible stopwatch is ticking, the quiet weight of invisible labor related to daily life as a mother is a continual presence. It is not a problem or unbearable burden in normal circumstances, but can always be felt pressing down to some degree. However, motherhood's invisible load was increased with the onset of the global pandemic, which closed our children's schools. Prior to COVID-19, we routinely performed mental calculations upon waking, to bedtime: figuring how evolving kids' schedules work in tandem with our own, childcare logistics, running the household, always alongside our research, teaching, writing and service.

We are accustomed to recalculating backup plans when work demands more, children get sick, or last-minute childcare falls through. COVID-19 essentially removed our childcare options for the foreseeable future, causing us to now calculate, how can I work two jobs—teaching/caring for children, and showing up for my own job—in the same physical place, simultaneously? Unsurprisingly, that

Fasching-Varner, K.J. Bickmore, S.T., Hays, D.G., Schrader, P.G., Carlson, D.L. Anagnostopoulos, D. (Eds.) Corona Chronicles: Necessary Narratives in Uncertain Times 27-34 © 2021 DIO Press All Rights Reserved