

Writing Latinos

S2E7

Jamie Figueroa

Jamie: How do we really ask the questions and stand in the spaces that interrogate what it means to fill oneself fully with what is life giving and life affirming and reclaiming, um, our, our ancestry, which lives. and animates in us every moment.

Gerry: My name is Geraldo Cadava, and welcome to Season 2 of Writing Latinos, a podcast from Public Books. We're back for more conversations with Latino authors writing about the wide world of Latinidad. As always, some of our episodes are nerdy and academic, while others are playful and lighthearted. All offer thoughtful reflections on Latino identity, and how writing conveys some of its meanings.

If you like what you hear, like and subscribe to Writing Latinos wherever you get your podcasts. And now for the show. We are excited to talk today with Jamie Figueroa about her new memoir, *Mother Island, A Daughter Claims Puerto Rico*, published by Pantheon. We've been looking forward to it for a long time.

Mother Island is Figueroa's second book. Her first one is called *Brother, Sister, Mother Explorer*. *Mother Island* is about Figueroa's childhood in Ohio, her relationship with her mother, and her deepening connection with New Mexico and Puerto Rico. She teaches in the creative writing program at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe.

I kind of wanted to start, if it's okay with you, with these different Latino geographies. I mean, Ohio, New Mexico, and Puerto Rico are Latino geographies of very different sorts. But I was wondering if you have ideas about and can talk to us a little bit about how each of those places in one way or another made you who you are today.

Jamie: Growing up in rural central Ohio, um, my understanding of what it meant to be Latina in that space was, um, was pretty nil. Right. So for me, it was being deep inside a profound longing to have a sense of connection and

belonging, um, with family, with extended family, um, with a greater sense of knowledge, traditional knowledge and story.

that would nourish me as I grew, um, and fortify me as I looked out into the world, that I would essentially be coming from a place of connection and relation, but it was, you know, quite the opposite as the book goes into. So for me, you know, coming to New Mexico, Northern New Mexico, especially, it has just felt like Ohio never felt to me a place of, um, home, um, I know many people say that, you know, from all different backgrounds and I'm, I'm cognizant of that.

Um, and yet, you know, uh, the, the, the layered textured history and, um, the way things are currently as well with representation of indigenous folks thriving and also, you know, You know, we get this, this quote unquote Hispanic lineage, right? Um, and then we get the mixing of that, um, in so many ways. Um, so many families in, in New Mexico and especially Northern New Mexico have all of these incredible facets, you know, and that is also something that feels familiar, right?

That within a family, there are multiple dynamics of identity and of the stories Each person within a family and an extended family tells themselves about who they are and where they come from, and that it can differ brother to sister, cousin to cousin, right? That is a very, that's very particular, right?

That's very particular to mixed heritage, to historically mixed heritage peoples. And so there's that familiarity as well, in addition to, to many other points of familiarity. But Being in Puerto Rico, I haven't done for a number of years. So I have to also be really careful and thoughtful about folks who are much more, um, who are much better about frequenting the island and, and have a much stronger, closer, uh, relationship with that is it's so interesting to me how a place can, um, how a body can hold a place right now going to Puerto Rico for the first time, I, um, very much felt.

My mother, her smell, the way she moved, her body, even when, um, when I didn't know what, even knew what that meant, right? In all of these places, I at first think of the personal and my own personal experience, right? How it lands in my body, the ways in which I find places to be. that I can relate. And the more complexity, I feel like the more space there is to bring a sense of fullness and wholeness of self.

And I believe that's what I also find here in New Mexico, which is essential to me.

Gerry: You know, one of the things I was wondering about Ohio As you were describing growing up there is how did you even know as a young person what you were missing out on in the sense that like, you know, there was an absence that needed to be filled.

There was something about your deep past that you needed to learn about yourself. And how did you even have that feeling as a young person that, you know, you were There was something else that you had to go look for. Was it stories about Puerto Rico or, uh, your mother's kind of talking about her family's past?

What, what was it that made you think that there was something else that you wanted to connect with?

Jamie: I think it was feeling excluded, fundamentally. You know, othered and looking for, uh, that place where I could see myself mirrored back to me and not having that and not creating some great sense of confusion and kind of wrongness, um, and the need to, um, to correct that in some way, right, to overachieve, to, to prove to others I was worthy of their time and attention.

But there's There's deep, um, there's deep layers of shame in that even before you know what shame is or what shame means, right, to just feel like somehow because you're not like the others, there's a wrongness. And so I don't think if you would have asked me or tried to have a conversation with me when I was 15 16 17 right I would have been able to verbalize how much I wanted to know and feel and be with ultimately those who are like me because I didn't really understand all the ways in which I was different I just was right but I'll tell you being with other writers of the Caribbean diaspora especially It's such an incredible experience and sensation, you know?

Gerry: Where have you connected with those other writers?

Jamie: Uh, when the novel came out, I was a part of the Brooklyn Caribbean Festival. Um, online and we had meetings before my particular panel. And this, there was just this incredible sense of connectivity and, and celebration and voice and representation throughout the islands.

that was so meaningful. I'll tell you, I feel like for all, all of the growth I have done since that age of 15, 16, right? 17 young woman. Um, and I have done so much growth and learned so much. There is still, you know, the next 50 years of coming to understand I think what it truly means to, to be Boricua, especially, um, off island, you know?

Gerry: I, I feel like I'm tempted to almost ask another follow up question about what you just said. I mean, what, what more do you need to learn about being Boricua, and do you think there is a moment you will ever arrive at complete awareness of what that means?

Jamie: I don't think so. I think it will be forever elusive, right?

And that's part of, it's part of that journey, of course, you know, not to be, um, trite about putting the, the value in the, in the journey. But of course it's true, right? And as the, as I learn and as I develop more relationships and I'm also changing, right? With that. So it's ever, it's an ever moving target as I grow and change as the information changes, um, as the relationships grow.

Gerry: Yeah. Books are interesting like that because you have in Mother Island, of course, committed at all to To the page and it's out in the world and, you know, books can feel like final statements on things, but we'll have to catch up again in 10 years to talk about how your, uh, version of yourself that you wrote in Mother Island has evolved as you've learned more about Boricua.

Jamie: And, you know, I had to be so careful in with myself as I was writing it because there were many times it seemed as though I had to have the answers and I had to draw some sort of conclusion. And I knew that even in the time from the last edits of the book to it coming out, I would continue to grow and evolve and change.

So really thinking about the book as the beginning of a conversation and as myself as ever becoming and changing, um, and really. standing on that place that's ever shifting, which is a, it's a bit of a precarious place to hold, I think, in one's mind and in one's, um, being to write from that place. And also that's the true place.

Gerry: One of the things that I find so fascinating about your story is that you are a Puerto Rican woman, Boricua, writing and learning to write and learning about your Taino ancestry, your African ancestry in New Mexico. And as I think you got your MFA at the Institute of American Indian Arts, where As we've already said, in the middle of Santa Fe, there's this other long history of colonization, conquest, indigeneity, and, you know, I'm just guessing, I could be entirely wrong about this, but at the IAIA in Santa Fe, I'm guessing that the, the most common conversations about indigeneity and colonization and the conquest, they're kind of rooted in the history of the Southwest, I would imagine, and what Native American identity in the Southwest means.

So I guess what I'm wondering is, you know, as you were learning about Puerto Rico and Taíno ancestry, African ancestry, and your Caribbean roots in that place, you know, what do you think, um, you know, Native American history or the history of Spanish colonization of the Southwest taught you about the colonization of Puerto Rico and indigeneity on Puerto Rico?

Jamie: You know, well, I'll first say that I, I, That has, um, within its, uh, community, I think at any given time, nearly 90 different tribes represented. So it is located in the Southwest and there are a lot of folks from the Southwest, but there are a lot of, um, native folks from all over the U. S. right? Hawaii, Alaska and beyond.

That Spanish influence is a, is a, um, I want to call it a kinship. Right. It's not favorable. And I feel like kinship tends to be favorable, right? But having generations that have survived the Spanish conquest, it's a particular history. And, and having that shared because that embeds itself in all ways of relating to, to the indigenous culture, right?

Um, after all of this time. So, um, that particular element feels like extended family of sorts. And then if we look at Pre Conquest, all of the traveling that was happening and we're understanding this more and more and it's much more extensive than we originally thought it was. But, you know, folks were not just sitting in their little spots where we come to know them right now, right?

Folks from all over the Caribbean were moving throughout Central America and throughout. Um, the South, what is now the Southwest, um, and the South and the East of the US. So, you know, I've heard stories of connection, um, of Taíno people in this place, in this area over time. And that's part of the ongoing research and the ongoing understanding of, of further points of connection.

But I will say that it feels like what is centralized is not only the point of bringing colonization and decolonization into nearly every conversation, but also reindigenizing, right? So when we think about this way of decolonizing, and I'm not speaking against that word in any way, shape, or form, it's absolutely necessary.

But there is something else, right? There's what we replace that with. There's how we come to identify that in our own language. begin to put our efforts there, right? So I think about in, in Taíno, there's a word called and that means water relatives. And I've come to think about re indigenizing, um, in this way, that it's because that means that we have to understand the way in which we once arrived at an island and greeted each other as relatives.

Which isn't necessarily what's happening now, right? There is a hierarchy throughout the Caribbean of who has colonized who and on and on. So I think that there's examples for me everywhere. And in many ways, my, my colleagues, my peers, my students, we all, I feel like take turns leading each other and in our thought and our art, um, as far as how do we bring forward what is authentically true, not a performance, not this kind of what is easiest to grab onto, right?

To kind of decorate the surface of something. But how do we really ask the questions and stand in the spaces that interrogate what it means to fill oneself fully with what is life giving and life affirming and reclaiming, um, our, our ancestry, which lives. and animates in us every moment.

Gerry: I love the idea of Nitaíno and water relatives.

As you've talked with colleagues and students in New Mexico, have they told you about any kind of similar concept in, among other communities?

Jamie: I've heard other folks from other communities have words in their own language. I'm thinking, uh, about a storyteller from the lower Elwha and I forget the word that he used in his language, but I remember he was talking about riding the canoe as a way of re-indigenizing, but that particular word in that, and it's much more than that, right?

It's, um, seated in the context that's, um, that, that has its own story within those people, but that, um, The efforts of decolonizing is riding the canoe.

Gerry: Water relatives is such a beautiful way of describing our encounter with other people and, you know, what our relationships are. I like that. So, um, you know, we, we have to talk about your mother and are you ready?

Jamie: Thanks for wading slowly into that. Oh, I, you know, I wrote a book about my mother. And myself and many other things, but that, you know, there's going to be questions about my mother. And for a moment, I was like, Oh, I don't want to talk about my

Gerry: mother. I know. Well, you know, I mean, we can start there. I mean, um, I think, I think in the early pages, you say something about your family's kind of, um, ambivalence about your project, kind of digging up these histories and how you characterize them.

So even before we get into the relationship, I mean, how has that been for you in the writing of this book? And how much of the book did you share with family members, um, as you wrote it?

Jamie: I didn't share any of the book, um, with family members. And, you know, I'm sure there are some people out there who are vehemently against that, that their process would look much different.

But for me, It was really, uh, a matter of honoring my voice and sustaining my voice without interruption. For me, what happened for me when I did that was I came up against my own repetition. I came up against my own limited compassion. I came up against my own, uh, blindnesses, right? I came up against so much within myself that I had to continue to face again and again and again.

without the distraction or feeling like I need, I owed someone something. And again, given your family structure, you know, that will resonate with you in a particular way. But I feel like the greatest way to honor another is with this intense complexity of truth, of love, of, um, of forgiving and yet of a new iteration of relating to one another.

And so I didn't want my own experience of these stories to be diluted or distracted by what another might be thinking, what another might want, right? Because it's so easy to think, um, I could be nicer about this, right? I could be nicer about this. And I think in mother daughter relationships, it's a bit of a hornet's nest.

It's a bit of a hornet's nest, you know, archetypically. And I don't think we actually do service to each other just being nice about it and doing what's expected. When you're looking at making generational change around trauma and healing, at some point, someone has to be disruptive. And, um, Apparently that's me.

Gerry: You're the, you're the disruptive one. You've been the problem child ever since you had been questioning those things that were being put upon you. So now, now I think hearing you say this and why you made the decisions to You know, write the book without showing any of it to family members or anything.

I think I understand some of your refrains more where throughout, I think you, you had a lot of beginnings of paragraphs where you said like, this is how I remember it, this, this is my memory of it, you know, where if your approach

had been different and you had been in kind of constant conversation with your family, you could have.

then said, well, this is how I remember it, but my aunt or whoever remembers it this way and included their version of the story as well. And I, I like your idea about, um, just letting your words stand and, and kind of. you driving the narrative there?

Jamie: I think there's also something about facing the rupture, right?

And it's evident in the choices that I make, what has happened with my, with my family. Right. Um, and that's also a way in which the, the, um, the content and the craft, um, is showing up in the structure as well. These are, speaking to each other throughout the entire piece, and it's all evidence of, of this, uh, generational rupture.

Gerry: That's really interesting. I mean, before, I feel like we've, gotten into the dynamic already and before we get too far ahead of ourselves, I think maybe it would be helpful to listeners to just know a little bit more about your mother. You know, the, the images that come across to me in the book are, you know, the lady in the red shoes who kind of serially married one husband after another.

But why don't you, um, tell listeners a little bit in your own words about your mother, who she is and, uh, you know, gosh, I know that that's going to be. tough to encapsulate.

Jamie: So my mother, um, was born and raised in Puerto Rico until she was about, uh, nine, I believe that's an approximation, came, um, to New York and was soon thereafter put in a Catholic orphanage, a mission on Staten Island and was left there until she was, was nearly 18.

So that is the. Foundation of my mother's story and pretty much animated and and continues to animate I believe how she how she relates to herself and how she relates to others how she relates to her daughters and so for that little girl um who went through that tremendous tremendous trauma. I have considerable, you know, compassion for, of course.

And then what gets more difficult are the decades after that, where that experience still predominates the narrative and is the go to narrative. So, you know, I can tell you many things about my mother. She, I think she's just the, um, image to me of sheer will and survival. I mean, um, I don't think anyone has

impressed me as much with their ability to be resilient and resourceful, um, than this force of a human who is my mother.

And, um, I, I believe, you know, she has an incredible capacity to, to laugh and to find, um, a good natured way, uh, around many situations that are challenging. But I would really say that, that those are some primary ways of, of thinking about my mother and what I draw, draw on for the book.

Gerry: That's great. No, that's great.

And I think that, you know, one of the. As you've just described it, and I think one of the concepts in the book that comes up, have you come to think about it as something that was put upon her, or decisions that she made to assimilate?

Jamie: I think it's a real nasty combination of the two, you know? Yeah. I think when someone feels like they have no other choice, Um, when maybe they've tried to have another choice, but, but that doesn't work, right?

As per her reality, as per her abilities, I, you know, I know others her age at that time were choosing differently. They were choosing the exact opposite. Right? To really stand in what it meant to be a Puerto Rican. And I feel like, uh, there could be an argument made that their ties to their families and the island was much stronger.

I don't know what it must have been like to endure being prohibited to speak Spanish when that's the only language that you knew and being punished for it. Just the horror of that. It's really chilling. It makes me think of Indian boarding school. It makes me think of, you know, those institutions where young ones are, are put and they are stripped of their identities.

You know, it's a, it lays in the cells in a particular way. And I feel like, uh, that kind of programming, that kind of, of, you know, colonizing, it's hard to, it's hard to have a choice about that.

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You know, one of the things you said in the book is how, as colonized people, we always tend to bifurcate realities in terms of like good or bad. And so in that sense, I think my question about whether it was something that was forced upon her or a choice she made is another one of these colonized minds bifurcations.

And when, of course, they're always intertwined and, you know, even if, yeah, if something is. put upon you, like speaking English. I mean, that then conditions all of the choices you make afterwards, right? I mean, oh, well, I was told that this is wrong, so maybe I should make other choices. So it's clear from your book that you have deep love for your mother and deep connection and attachment.

And I don't want to say, I don't know if resentment is the right word. I don't think that's necessarily it, or maybe it is, you tell me, but I do think that You know, there are moments where you had wished something different from your mother or that she had had given you different things and then that you had to go find those things on your own.

So maybe you could Explain a little bit about that dynamic, the kind of push and pull between, I think this resonates with all of us, right? I mean, this is something we all experience with our parents, but these moments where we, we recognize deep love, but at the same time are, had wanted something more.

Jamie: I think it's, it's also the natural inclination for a child to need to regulate themselves, to co regulate themselves with their parents.

Um, and of course as little children we have no idea what that is or means except we want to be near and we want to feel that sense of nearness, to feel a sense of, of, of rightness within ourselves, uh, that calms us. That was not a consistent experience. That was a, that was a faulty line. Because of that, of course, it put me in a state of.

Trying to understand, uh, what was it about me that couldn't, right? That's kind of the first place we'd go. What is it about me that I can't hold my mother's attention in a way that in other mother daughter relationships is quite natural? And then moving from that to um, really beginning to see just fundamental limitations in a person that just because you need something from a parent and potentially they want to give it to you doesn't mean that they are able to.

And I feel like that's the most brutally honest and painful, um, uh, you know, statement to you to really wrestle with, right? Um, especially as a parent, right? If we think about our own children and that they need something from us that we want to give it to them and if we're unable to, the heartbreak in that.

Gerry: I'm wondering, something I was wondering while reading throughout the book is how you came to attach all of these tensions with your mother or the

hornet's nest of a mother daughter. relationship, as you described. I mean, how did you come to attach those to colonialism and what colonialism erases?

Because, for example, you know, you, you write a lot about her kind of serial marriages, how she moved from one person to another. Now, there would be one way of narrating that that's just like, you know, my, my mother had some need for constant attention and reaffirmation or something. That's probably a feeling that many, um, children have about, parents who kind of exhibit that quality or habit.

But then how did you come to attach that to, um, you know, uh, an ancestry or a heritage or a past that had been ripped away?

Jamie: I really needed to put my mother into context. Right? It's one thing to, to talk about a woman and her choices and her behavior without context. I feel like that is sort of the, the go to and the, the dominant culture, mainstream thinking.

Um, you know, we look at the Western literary canon and primarily it is white men who don't talk about their context, right? It's as if there have no context or their context has nothing to do with the way that they think. think, right? Um, but when we slow down and consider epistemology, right? And how we come to think the way that we think there's a lot going on that needs to be considered and included.

And so as a way of doing justice to my mother and her inability for, for a number of years to, to keep up, to keep a vow or to work within a relationship. Um, And to, from my point of view, dispose of them so easily was, and had to be linked to something larger, right? And then when I put my mother within the context of her younger years, within the context of her family, within that family's context on the island and that island's history, um, and knowing how epigenetics works, right?

There are these continuous struggles, these continuous. Forces of colonization happening. within her, um, that she's having to navigate within me, right? Within you that we're constantly having to navigate. And so when you bring that to bear, it complicates everything. And that's what I was interested in, continuing to complicate it more and more and more.

Gerry: Yeah, I think that's a beautiful way of explaining it. I mean, even if these are universal experience, not maybe not universal, but common experiences among people, they are different. For different individuals who were raised in particular context. So, so that makes a lot of sense. Um, you

know, earlier on you talked about this idea of rupture and how that was important to you too.

And there are these really kind of poignant moments in your book, uh, where that rupture is evident and it's painful. So, one, one that jumps to mind is this moment where a little bit later in life when you're an adult already, Um, Your mother wants you to sleep with her, to kind of lay, lay in bed with her and kind of cuddle her to sleep, which, um, you don't do, you don't do it, you know, because you talk about how you had decided and that you needed to kind of hold firm.

to the boundary that you had worked so hard to establish, that must have been really painful too, at the same time that it was reaffirming of a lot of the choices you had already made.

Jamie: Yeah, absolutely. And, and I'll say, you know, earlier in the book, there are images and I'm recounting of all of us, my two older sisters and my mother and I sleeping in the same bed.

And that's also a cultural thing too, right? Of being very close to each other and, um, and, and feeling that, um, sense of safety and connection. In my head, I'm going so many different places at once. There's the place that's like, and I can hear other women saying it to me and other women who have said it to me, like, will you ever forgive your mother?

And when you get to X age, you'll understand and have compassion for your mother. And you'll understand, you know, in this very patronizing way, there's also something else, which is resisting the temptation to be the thing that is always used to, uh, sop up. the emotional drainage from the trauma of my mother's life.

And in resisting and having those boundaries, what I'm actually saying is not, I'm not going to give you what you want to be cruel. In those moments, what I'm saying is, I have to be able to define myself and my own sense of selfhood for my own health and well being. I need to be able to draw the boundaries.

I need to be able to honor my own choices and Um, be respectful with myself and show myself love in that way. And so on the one hand it looks, um, you know, it can look, um, harmful, you know, to not meet my mother in that simple request for some. And I'm sure others will also understand who have complex relationships, um, with complex people who are their parents or their mother.

That there, there was a shift of who I'm loyal to. And that in of itself feels like speaking back to. all of those centuries of colonization as well. I am loyal to the territory of myself, which does not make me a force of harm. It makes me responsible. It makes, puts me in relationship with, but I get to say, especially, uh, in the face of Someone who needs to wield me towards, um, towards their own, to their own needs before mine.

Gerry: Absolutely. And you know, the end of that story, too, is that, you know, you, you were in a lot of ways very generous with her requests. You, at the same time that you said, no, you're not going to do that, you did say, You're going to be okay, it's safe here. And then I thought it was interesting how the moment after that, she was the one who went to sleep peacefully before you did.

You know, she was the one, and you went, you went in to check on her twice before you yourself went to bed. So there was care there, even in the moment that you were telling her.

Jamie: Yeah. Thank you for, for bringing that forward. And you know, I was thinking as well, if there's someone who always is asking you to choose them over yourself, that creates a very particular dynamic that isn't healthy, right?

We know this. And also to that point, I have to choose myself because if I don't choose myself, who will choose me? Right. If I'm, if I'm left with the, with the obligation or out of loyalty, always choosing my mother over myself, who will, there's no one to choose me. And I feel like that's a real point of growth, um, that happened, has happened in my life is, is learning how to choose myself.

And that is an act of, of love.

Gerry: Yeah, and what's interesting about that, too, is that this relates to another kind of poignant moment for me where you're talking about the umbilical cord that still attaches you to your mother. This is in your imagination, but the flow of nourishment has changed. if you want to call it, that has started to move in the other direction.

No longer is she nourishing you, which is what happens early in life, but you are nourishing her. And maybe that kind of nourishment moving in the opposite direction can only happen after you start making decisions for you, because only then do you have, uh, the, the, the, your own nutrients that can nourish someone else.

Jamie: There's also something in me that, that is resistant, that is, um, sees that is also kind of a perverse way, right? That, that, that. The, that the child would be somehow putting it through an unnatural process of nourishing the mother. Um, and so how to reconcile that, you know, um, and then I think also when we have our own children.

That becomes, um, it just becomes in sharper contrast, right? I wish it didn't have to be either or, right? I wish it didn't have to be, I have, I have to choose one or the other. I have to choose, you know, myself over my mother or else I don't get the, the space that I need to be with myself fully, but I know I'm not alone.

in that quandary. I know there are many who find themselves in the same situation. So what do we do? What do we do with ourselves? And what do we do with those relationships?

Gerry: What did you, you know, once, once that nourishment kind of starts and the, and the teaching starts flowing in the other direction, what have you concluded about What is possible to teach a parent and what lessons for them can be learned?

Because I think, I mean, I think about this all the time with my own family too, is like, there are many things that I would love to change about my parents or would have loved to change about my grandparents. But sometimes I think that Older folks set in their ways are kind of incapable of learning lessons, but you try, you know, you bring your mother with you to Santa Fe, she visits, you then take her to, uh, Puerto Rico later in her life.

Um, so what, what did she learn? What was she capable of learning later in life about herself and about her relationship with you through visiting you in your adult life in New Mexico and Puerto Rico?

Jamie: You know, I can say what I hope. Um, I hope that what happened was she, she saw that which she couldn't include for the longest time, her language, her culture, um, traditional ways of being that, that that has a place, that that's valuable.

That that can be reclaimed and recovered and celebrated, and that perhaps some of the shame of, uh, being corrected as a child, right, in that, uh, mission. was honored that she was not bad or wrong, nor did she come from a bad, wrong place or from bad, wrong people who needed to be silenced and erased.

Gerry: What were some of the examples of writing that you were turning to or thinking about when you thought about what you wanted your book to be?

Jamie: You know, when I think about genre, I don't think about one thing, right? So when I'm thinking about creative nonfiction, that's a loose category for me. I know that, you know, when I'm teaching, of course, I want students to understand what the fundamental rules of engagement are and how they need to orient themselves and consider building upon their understanding of the craft.

And. What I'm more interested in is how, how does fiction fit into creative nonfiction and vice versa? How does poetry fit into fiction and also creative nonfiction? That one genre isn't any one thing. And also that is an echo of, of our own identities, right? That we can't be held or contained within one category.

And so the need to break these limitations, the book was also a movement towards that. It was a movement to, um, disrupt ideas of what, uh, you know, creative nonfiction or memoir and needs to look like. There are many people who are doing this, of course, challenging the form using experimental forms and aspects of storytelling, aspects of song, how we can reshape something in order to make more, spell more space for the whole of ourselves, right.

In that attempt is also thematically everything of the book.

Gerry: I think it came together beautifully. I really enjoyed reading it. And I wanted to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today, Jamie. And for all of the listeners out there, I want to encourage you to read *Mother Island, A Daughter Claims Puerto Rico*, out from Pantheon.

And written by Jamie Figueroa. So, thank you so much for joining me, Jamie.

Jamie: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Gerry: Thank you for listening to this episode of *Writing Latinos*. We'd love to hear your suggestions for new books that we should be reading and talking about. Drop us a line at gerald@publicbooks.org. This episode is brought to you by Public Books. It was produced by Tasha Sandoval. Our music is *City of Mirrors* by the Chicago based band *Dos Santos*.

I'm Geraldo Cadava, we'll see you again next time.