

## EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

### Seguimos luchando: Inside/Outside Power Structures

Josie Méndez-Negrete

**Another MALCS** Summer Institute, July 2012—*Todos Somos Arizona: Confronting the Attacks on Difference*—has come and gone. About 400 scholars of divergent ranks, academics-in-the making, community activists, and undergraduate students attended the event at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), under the leadership of Aída Hurtado, Chair of Chicana/o Studies as well as the Site Committee at UCSB. A multiplicity of panels, workshops, and plenary sessions served to focus on our activism and academic work, concluding with record attendance at the Tortuga Awards dinner in Santa Barbara. Yalidi Matos, a Dominican Ph.D. student who attended her first MALCS Institute, wrote a reflection on her participation for “Mujeres Talk.” She states,

I started my MALCS conference experience at a 9:00 a.m. panel and spent the rest of the day listening to Chicana testimonies that helped me understand, for example, how to begin to think about the reconciliation of cultural and academic epistemologies...mujeres theorized and wrote from a place of engagement and for social change. The paper presentations were not only theoretically rigorous, but they went beyond theory and provided ways to practice social change as well. As the day progressed I became more and more inspired by them and elated to see Latina faculty and graduate students actively making such a difference. (“Mujeres Talk,” August 6, 2012)

The opening plenary focused on institutional violence. Ester Trujillo, graduate student and member of the Site Committee, reflected on this plenary in the MALCS Summer Institute blog.

The first Summer Institute Plenary attracted over 150 conference attendees, UCSB students, and community members...Rusty Barceló, Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo, Audrey Silvestre, and Nadia Zepeda provided a sobering view into their experiences with institutional violence during their talk titled, "MALCS Decolonial Work: Naming and Undoing Institutional Violence, From SB 1070 to Chicano Studies." Moderator Antonia I. Castañeda gave an insightful introduction...on institutional violence and its relation to physical violence. (July 20, 2012, <http://institute.malcs.org/>)

This was the first in a series of sessions designed to address violence. Social and cultural violence implicit in the inequality experienced by Chicanas/Latinas and people of color continues to escalate as limited options in employment emerge, along with challenges to a culturally affirming education, with attacks on ethnic studies, particularly Mexican American and Chicana/o Studies. Various sessions addressed this particular issue as challenging our right to a culturally affirming education, threatening our economic, cultural, and political survival.

Myths and stereotypes that deride our people and make invisible our contributions continue to magnify our marginalization, even while we bolster the nation's cultural and social capital. Attacks against brown people by those who question our right to live in the United States challenge our very survival—in times of political strife, economic insecurity, and war—as we continue to be subjugated and legislated out of our rights in our daily lives in a society that by design perceives us as disposable surplus labor.

To reinforce such insidious notions, Mexican-descent people have been historically represented as a group that is present-oriented and lacks the imagination and fortitude to access opportunities or create wealth, even though our people risk their lives to cross the nation's borders despite militarization and the presence of racist vigilantes. Immigrants from south of the border do not come to this nation for handouts; immigrants show the highest rate of employment and the least reliance on public assistance, even though Americans who vehemently rail against us would argue that we are parasitic people who come here to benefit from all the nation offers—a birth certificate, an education, and health services. These stigmatizing notions have inspired such laws as Proposition 187 in California and SB 1070 in Arizona, among others. Attributes such as dumb, lazy, docile, and criminally-minded are assigned to us to further argue the point that we are uneducable. These descriptors are but some among the many cast about to undermine and deride us as a people.

Despite our connection to the continent, the nation and its states challenge our presence as foreign and not belonging. Attacks against ethnic studies programs aim to erase the knowledge we carry and undermine the gains we have made during the past half-century. Still, we document the multiple realities we have been studying, unearthing, and researching as academics. Despite our intellectual labor, because of the legacy of racialization and attributions assigned to us as second-class citizens, we continue to be perceived as products of affirmative action or diversity hires.

Historically we have fought for our rights in the courts; *Méndez v. Westminster* is one case among many. Still, our people are limited as to their participation in society as laws and regulations challenge our right to full citizenship. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is yet another piece of

legislation that is being tested and challenged to undermine our power with the ballot, as politicians, who do not have our best interests in mind, promote voter ID laws. While some of us would tout President Obama's recent Executive Order to stop deportations of young persons who came to the United States as children, there are those of us who believe that we have much to lose in this myopic band-aid solution. To remain in the United States with only partial rights and lacking a path to full citizenship diminishes our humanity.

We must continue to struggle for our rights. As we necessarily challenge the social and cultural violence—laws and regulations as well as perceptions that deride us—and fight for the right to learn and impart our own histories.

The book review and essays in this issue reclaim the contributions made by and about Chicanas/Latinas. Linda Heidenreich makes a case for Blackwell's rejection of "monolithic conceptualizations of 'the feminist movement,'" noting that the author utilizes "histories and public and private archival sources to excavate, map, and analyze what she terms 'multiple feminist insurgencies.'" Heidenreich offers that, "The result is layered and vibrant, with the struggles, strategies, histories, and legacies of a generation of Chicana feminists reaching out to the reader from the pages of the text."

This issue, with its illustrations, essays, and creative works, displays the complexity of Chicana/Latina presence in U.S. society. Violence and gender relations, notions of leadership and activism, as well as nuanced ways in which we understand the presence of Africa in Latin America, continue to engage us in a critical discourse of citizenship. To begin with, Cristina Herrera engages Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's 2009 novel, which "traces five generations of Afro-Puerto Rican women living on the island and in New

York City.” She situates the text within the genre of “creative non-fiction essays posed on Afro-Latinas, which argue that this group of women is unable to combat racism and sexism within Latina/o communities and U.S. mainstream society.” Rather than construct Afro-Latinas as victims of racism and sexism, Herrera argues “that the novel contests writings on Afro-Latinas, suggesting that strong bonds between Afro–Puerto Rican mothers and daughters function as a mode of empowerment and subjectification.”

As in the past, with our legacy of involvement in civic and cultural organization, the self-help approach of mutualistas, and civil rights activism, Hortencia Jiménez and Nannette Regua provide evidence of the ways in which we continue to engage the invisibility of institutional and social violence. In her essay, Jiménez proposes a model for understanding relational qualities of leadership as she argues for a new way of understanding it. For her, leadership is “a continuous and regular accomplishment achieved through everyday practices.” Contrary to traditional notions of leadership vested in social location and positionality, she offers that, “Doing leadership is not ascribed or static, but rather an action, a process that is relational, non-authoritarian, and non-hierarchical.” Her ethnographic study reveals “three common modes of doing leadership: leadership that is shared, leadership behind the scenes, and leadership that serve[s] the community.” Moreover, she offers: “Doing leadership moves away from traditionally patriarchal and hierarchical models for understanding social organizing and leadership, thus capturing diverse Chicana/Latina leadership practices.” Regua, with the case of San José, California, in her discussion of mujeres in the movimiento, “seeks to provide a more complete and nuanced picture of women’s roles and contributions to the movement, thereby expanding our understanding of regional Chicana grassroots activism.” In her essay, she “analyzes ten oral narratives of Chicana activist veterans of San José who

articulate their leadership roles in the movement, revealing their dedication as they mobilized and empowered their community.”

From the artist's statement to the book reviews, these contributors continue to engage dialogue that will inspire each one of us to deal with the cultural and social violence we must necessarily resist and challenge. As individuals and as groups, we have much work to do. We must struggle against second-class status, as we contest, interrogate, and peel off the internalized oppression of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality that veils the unity possible amongst us. We must be ready to confront the violence inherent in the structures and institutions within which we interact so that we may purge the internalized oppressions that reside inside each one of us. Now, let us shift...