

## ENDING HETEROPATRIARCHAL INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE IN CHICANO STUDIES: A Reflection on Our Path

The Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional  
Violence and Focused Issue Editors

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### MALCS’s Call to Action

With this focused issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of MALCS*, we commemorate three pivotal moments in Chicana feminist and organizational history that are the base upon which we stand; we signal both the work of the MALCS Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Violence and that of the authors in this collection. We commemorate vital anniversaries pertaining to the development of Chicana Studies and to the creation of this journal, including:

- The thirty-second anniversary of the founding of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), Davis, California, in 1982.
- The thirty-first anniversary of “Chicanas in the 1980s: Unsettled Issues,” the first panel at NACCS to center gender and sexuality as categories of analysis in Chicano Studies. This panel led to the initial creation of the Chicana Caucus at the eleventh NACCS Annual Conference, Tempe, Arizona, in 1983.
- The thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the Chicana Caucus, and of “Chicana Voices: Intersections of Class, Race and Gender,” the title and theme of the twelfth Annual NACCS

Conference Austin, Texas, in 1984 and the subsequent conference publication.

We thank *Chicana/Latina Studies* and its Lead Editor, Josie Méndez-Negrete, as well as the journal staff, editorial boards, and reviewers, for working tirelessly to bring forth this focused issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies*. This is part of MALCS's unceasing work to change the structures of heteropatriarchal institutional violence and inequality against women, queer, and trans Chican@s. *Institutional Heteropatriarchal Violence and the Future of Chican@ Studies*, the title and content of this focused issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies* continues and commemorates the decolonizing work of transformational analytic paradigms that center the study of gender and sexuality in Chicana/o Studies. Whereas the analytic frame of Chicana/Chicano and Chicana/o Studies offer the possibility of an overdue attentive focus on Chicanas and Chicana feminisms, it does not necessarily critically interrogate the politics and terms that organize the assumption of gender dichotomy in the study of Chicanidades. The analytic frame of Chican@ Studies opens up the field of study to critically assess the reductive and bifurcating sexualizing/gendering tendencies that give rise to heteropatriarchal social landscapes. As Frank Galarte argues in this issue, the moves toward inclusivity made by the analytic frames "Chicana/o Studies" and "Chicana/Chicano Studies" still invoke heteropatriarchal disciplining.

This is among the unfinished work in the continuum of the civil, economic, educational, and cultural rights struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s that established Chicano Studies in colleges and universities across the United States and for the struggles that created NACCS, MALCS, and other Chicana/o organizations. The struggle we signal with this focused issue on heteropatriarchal institutional violence is both external and internal. It challenges us to not only examine and change the structured institutional violence embedded in

institutions like the universities in which we study and teach but also to look at how violence is structured through these institutions into the institutions we have created, beginning with Chicano Studies. Internal attacks within our communities through rape, domestic violence, and heteropatriarchal structures hostile to Chicanas, queer, and trans Chican@s form part of the continuum of attacks our community endures. Along with the daily attacks interdisciplinary departments such as Chicana/o and Ethnic Studies face, we must critically examine all the ways our communities come under attack, as ignoring violence within our communities makes us more vulnerable. Thus, actively working to end heteropatriarchal institutional violence is necessary for the liberation of our communities, and our activism is pivotal to the larger project of decolonizing our communities, the society in which we live, and ourselves.

### **MALCS Ad Hoc Committee on Heteropatriarchal Institutional Violence**

In 2011, in keeping with MALCS's commitment to engage in action and social change, the Executive Board of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social established the MALCS Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Violence at its Summer Institute in Los Angeles, California. This was a call to action because, despite three decades of studying, researching, teaching, publishing, and organizing to change hostile environments and structures of inequality in colleges and universities, including in Chicano Studies, heteropatriarchal institutional violence against women, queer, and trans Chican@s continues unabated.

In the nearly three years since we created the MALCS Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Violence, we actively worked to raise consciousness or *concientización* and bring forth the issue into the thinking, discourse, and dialogue at NACCS, MALCS, and other academic, sociopolitical, and social justice organizations in which we participate. Most recently, we partnered with

MalintZINE, the community-based Xicana feminist collective that is addressing issues of heteropatriarchal violence in social justice and educational justice movements in Tucson, Arizona, as reflected by their publication in this issue.

MALCS formed the Ad Hoc Committee in 2011 because precious few guideposts existed on how to conceptualize and address the subject of heteropatriarchal institutional violence. It is important to share our process in developing this thorny, long-silenced subject; thus, we offer a summary of the process with working definition.

**Working Definition of Heteropatriarchal Institutional Violence  
and Working Statement**

Institutional violence in general, and heteropatriarchal institutional violence in particular, are revealed in the ways social hierarchies of power are affected in the daily practices in all of our institutions. Institutional violence is structured into normalized processes and procedures that produce relations of domination leading to multiple forms of violence including its most visible form of physical and sexual violence. —MALCS Ad Hoc Committee

**Defining Institutional Violence: Our Process**

As evidenced in working documents, for members of the MALCS Ad Hoc Committee, naming our experiences of institutional violence was a painful and arduous task, but it was also a transformative act of recognition, of reclaiming our power, and of envisioning and engaging in diálogo about needed change. We gathered to discuss the many ways institutional violence against Chicanas and queer and trans Chican@s persists in colleges and universities throughout the United States—including in Chicano Studies.

When we defined institutional violence as a committee, we agreed upon a working definition to mark the need for continued discussion; “working” registers a dynamic process that recognizes changing political circumstances, that the definition may change depending on how it meets the needs of historical, sociopolitical, and social justice issues. “Working” demonstrates its use and value to those who seek social justice.

In 2011, we began organizing numerous panels, roundtables, workshops, and plenary sessions on this topic at the MALCS and NACCS annual conferences, as well as at the Texas Regional NACCS Conferences and other Ethnic Studies conferences. Our panels and discussions were intergenerational, like our committee. Reflecting the wisdom learned from experiences across multiple generations and from many walks of life, voices included undergraduate and graduate students, assistant to full professors, artists, activists, and independent scholars, as well as community groups and organizations.

At the 2012 NACCS Conference in Chicago, we shared the working definition and statement for the first time and continued to present it at various panels—we offer it as distributed in print. We anticipate that it may resonate through our various institutions. We urge everyone to take the concept and use it to address their experiences, so as to name and account for institutional violence. We believe that it provides the basis for coalitions across institutional settings, across departments, between and amongst social and political organizations and associations.

### **Working Statement**

Institutional violence is when members or participants of institutions and organizations, both formal and informal, are attacked, harassed, and/or subject to physical and sexual violence. Institutional violence

is built into the functioning of all institutions; it shows up as unequal power and may cause harm through a slow process. It is not always visible in a specific event but is always present, sanctioning and perpetuating a hostile environment. The structuring of unjust social relations requires the use of institutional violence and continually calls upon it in maintaining and legitimating structured domination.

Although some institutions and organizations may occasionally express a concern for a violent incident, they usually individualize the incident and rarely do they consider the ways institutional structures may be responsible. Instead, institutions may scapegoat an individual who is presumed to act “out of line” with the institution when in actuality, whether enacting heteropatriarchal and/or racial violence, that kind of hostility and inequity is well structured into systemic processes at most institutions. Most likely, institutions will ignore or deny the problem even exists, acting instead to protect the interests of the institution or organization.

Those that suffer from institutional violence are often shunned, blamed, and/or intimidated by systematic and institutionalized practices that directly or indirectly protect both the institution and the aggressor(s). An organizational culture and institutional leadership that dissuades investigation and accountability sanctions and encourages further hostilities and violence. Institutional violence persists when institutions and institutional actors avoid accountability to address, investigate and prevent the situation. In these ways, institutions directly and indirectly encourage the repetition of hostile and violent acts and perpetuate a hostile environment. —MALCS Ad Hoc Committee

In planning for the Ad Hoc Committee's work, we developed a path and goals. We determined that it is imperative for us and for MALCS to take this up with our Chicana/o Studies departments and social movements. When we take up the issue of institutional violence we are better able to address the various forms that heteropatriarchy takes and thus change the ways through which people are shut out of organizations through climates of derision, distrust, and exclusion.

This working definition creates viable processes to address institutional violence and enables the development of mechanisms of assessment to dismantle institutional violence. It insists on building and centering values that support feminists, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and transgender communities and knowledges where students and faculty are respected and their work and scholarship valued.

### **Assessing Power: Taking Responsibility**

As we remember our historic struggle fighting for Chicana/o Studies and civil rights, we must acknowledge that now, just as in the 1960s–1970s, our sociopolitical movements must formally address heteropatriarchal-institutionalized violence. Previously and still, feminist, lesbian, and gay people persist in raising issues of inequalities of gender and sexuality and continue to be silenced in our movements. Charges of “malinchistas,” “traitors,” “vendidas,” “lesbionage,” and “gringa feminist crap” were/are accompanied with sexual and/or physical violence. Our sociopolitical movements and academic fields, then and now, reproduce and enact heteropatriarchal-institutionalized violence present in society. The derailing analytic frame of *we can't deal with this now because we—Chicano Studies, Ethnic Studies, Immigrant/Dreamers movement, Latino issues—are under attack; wait until we win*, is not acceptable because violence against any one of us is violence against all of us, and our success depends on collective accountability.

Transforming our institutions requires a personal responsibility to the collective. This dialectic characterizes the social mission and vision of what we propose to be Chicana@ Studies. As we fight for the survival and growth of our programs, it is incumbent upon every one of us—students, faculty, and administrators—to reaffirm our commitment to all members of the community and to their concerns. This is our commitment to our founding of the discipline; this is what we agreed to in our field of study.

Each of us must take responsibility for how we participate in and reproduce heteropatriarchal institutional structures. We must also assess the ways we get caught up in politics of domination, even as Chicanas, even as queer Chicana@s, and even as Chicana feminists. For these reasons, we must take daily stock of the ways each of us use and abuse the power afforded to us by institutional structures—the power used to deepen the divides within our communities based on gender, sexuality, age, class, status, and levels of education. How this praxis arrives home to our departments and social justice movements begins with each and every one of us committed in partnership to developing social relations that are not embedded in or reproducing heteropatriarchal structures of violence but that instead enhance our work and our vision of Chicana@ Studies and our communities.

Community accountability is one method through which we can do the work of assessment. This process sets out to reconstruct our communities and our social movements, to create a culture that encourages a greater democratic sensibility and praxis. Our power comes from marshaling our energy and love for liberation and social justice. This is a field of practice accomplished by our capacity to embody collective and democratic structures. Through praxis of justice, each of us holds the power to address and create radical alternatives for our own and our community's work to end heteropatriarchal violence.



Both NACCS and MALCS were born in response to various forms of institutional violence. MALCS sought to create a space where mujeres could build on and strengthen Chicana feminist activist scholarship. In the twenty-first century, those of us facing heteropatriarchal violence turn to these institutions for support. They have been extraordinarily helpful in asserting a politics of solidarity with feminist and queer academic thought and resistance to heteropatriarchy in Chicana/o Studies and Chicana/o social movements. Furthermore, MALCS, NACCS, and other organizations have opened their doors to deepen the conversations about institutional violence, allowing us to imagine transformative change.

At the 2012 MALCS Summer Institute at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the Ad Hoc Committee asked the membership to pass a resolution for an investigation into institutionalized violence rooted in sexism, misogyny, and homophobia in Chicana/o Studies departments and programs. Building on the call issued by the resolution, in March 2013, the first meeting between MALCS and NACCS took place. Members of the MALCS Executive and Ad Hoc Committees met with the NACCS Executive Committee out of the vital need to address heteropatriarchal institutional violence. We proposed collaboration and drafted a resolution to present to NACCS at the business meeting. The NACCS Executive Committee was very receptive to the issue and to MALCS's resolution. The Ad Hoc Committee presented and received unanimous approval from all NACCS caucuses—with noted support from the Chicana, Lesbian Bisexual and Trans Mujeres, and Joto caucuses—along with most regional caucuses. Some signed on as co-sponsors of the resolution. On March 23, 2013, the MALCS Resolution passed at the NACCS Business meeting.

### **Community Accountability**

Every day we encounter hegemonic institutionalized structures formed within a framework that privileges wealthy and middle class white heterosexual men.

Those of us outside this oppressive framework experience constant hostility in these environments. We concur with Andrea Smith that “U.S. empire is built on a foundation of heteropatriarchy” and argue that this foundation naturalizes the institutional violence it inflicts on our communities (Smith 2005, 178). Our academic structures reflect this hostility. Coming into these spaces, we know immediately that we do not belong. Why then would we depend on a system to provide us justice when it has constantly failed us?

When we envision transformative change in our communities, we have to go beyond depending on institutions not created for us. This work requires us to look for alternative solutions outside state institutions. One such alternative is community accountability, defined as “the practice of imagining, creating, and applying alternative responses to violence from and within communities...[that] envision and create violence-free spaces and relationships” (Rojas 2011, 77–78). A community accountability method means that we come together as groups, having necessary conversation to assess and understand institutional violence, our institutional roles, and to create a culture of assessment and accountability for abuse and violence. In so doing, we engage a praxis that goes against heteropatriarchal structures that create a cycle of violence. By breaking this cycle, we begin the process of structural transformation that can lead us to break away from institutions that are hostile toward us, establishing the basis for change, and/or creating our own institutions not structured in violence.

Community accountability strategies offer possible direction to deepen the praxis of solidarity and support for the many students, faculty, and staff who struggle daily against institutional violence. How can processes of accountability be structured into these organizations? Structured accountability processes could inspire and motivate Chican@ Studies

departments, academic units, and student organizations to strengthen their own political understanding and commitment to transforming heteropatriarchal institutional practices.

While every accountability process may look different, depending on the uniqueness of each situation, these structured processes steer away from a punitive approach that may hinge on blaming or shaming an individual for enacting institutional violence. Instead, an accountability plan inspires all people to become involved and especially encourages those doing harm to consider the abuse of power in light of the institutional structures that support or legitimate such abuses. This can happen with deep consideration for practices that may be necessary or useful in achieving transformative change for the community and people involved. Structured processes of community accountability in student organizations, departments, and MALCS and NACCS could engender accountability praxis in the larger field of Chican@ Studies, thus fostering transformative change with the potential to put an end to heteropatriarchal violence. Community accountability of institutional violence invites a careful assessment of the many ways institutional violence may rear its face; compiling and editing this journal issue inspired the editorial collective to commit to editorial praxis that would not reproduce institutional violence.

### **Writing for Our Lives: Lessons Learned as Editors**

[Testimonios are] a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure.

—The Latina Feminist Group, *Telling to Live*

After organizing about a dozen panels, we decided it was time to collect testimonios and stories in print form, where we could more deeply analyze

and engage the lessons we learned and reach out to those who were not able to attend the gatherings. We approached the MALCS Executive Committee to lend their support in the production of this focused issue for *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of MALCS*. This called for the preparation of a proposal with support from the journal editors who had previously invited some of the panelists to submit their talks for possible publication in the journal. The journal seemed the right fit to publish a sustained conversation on heteropatriarchal violence given its focus and commitment to feminist editorial praxis. Following the journal's interest in building bridges between community and university settings, transforming higher education, and promoting new paradigms and methods, this focused issue comprises multiple genres that reflect our organizing work as the MALCS Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Violence.

When the articles began arriving, the Ad Hoc Committee read page after page of words of witness, as authors courageously addressed the subject of institutional violence by narrating the often gripping and painful experiences they endured. These words offer "theories of the flesh," lessons learned from and through our bodies that have borne the brunt of institutional violence and engaged in relentless resistance (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 23). Writing in testimonio style, they rupture the silences of stories never told in writing; they testify the lessons "carved and tattooed with the sharp needle of experience" (Anzaldúa 1990, xv). Authors distill the wisdom from bodies that hold the memory maps of their suffering and survival. In a long line of women of color writings, these authors bleed knowledge that is born from their will to refute institutional claims over their bodies, minds, and spirits.

As editors, we proceeded humbly as we witnessed and walked alongside authors unraveling their experiences on the page. Honored by their words

and their struggles, following the journal's expressed commitment to feminist editorial praxis we sought to counter punitive and demeaning editorial practices that often fail to lift, support, and strengthen the writer. Cognizant of the many faces of institutional violence inclusive of academic publication processes, we engaged in dialogue about the editorial collective's feminist praxis. We saw the importance of putting into practice an editorial role that is a source of support and encouragement and that recognizes the honor of being invited to humbly listen to the raw experiences of institutional violence and to witness the wisdom emergent in the telling of these experiences.

Institutional violence, like other forms of violence, erodes the subject's sense of self. The myriad institutional procedures and activities conjure an institutional self that exists through and for institutions and is dependent on the institution for survival. The publication process is one of the many stops along the way that can disengage a writer's sense of themselves as able, as confident knowledge makers. "Who am I, a poor Chicanita from the sticks to think I could write," wrote Gloria E. Anzaldúa as she addressed her multiple experiences with both educational institutions and the publishing sector (Anzaldúa 1983, 166).

What if when we wrote, we experienced, and our writing experienced, the kind of profound respect that the spiritual gift of the word merits? What would we say and how would we say it differently if we knew we would find support and encouragement to welcome our voices, to raise up our voices? This kind of editor/author relationship and engagement has the capacity to build a just relationship that honors everyone involved so that we do not internalize the silencing power of heteropatriarchal racism that discredits our voices and writing styles, that aims to extinguish our tongues of fire. As women of color in editorial roles, we can dangerously internalize and play out this legacy of oppression, even in our own communities.

So as we proceeded, we asked ourselves, *What would the editorial and publication process look like if our goals were to affirm voices, honor lives, grow spirits, to strengthen our stories and lift-up our communities and each other along the way?* As the authors began defining institutional violence in multiple ways, we also recognized that the collection needed to express a multi-voiced, multi-genre, and multi-generational articulation of the lived experience and understanding of heteropatriarchal institutional violence, and the approaches, methodologies, and strategies to end it.

On this thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Chicana Caucus of NACCS, MALCS calls us all to action—to Chican@ feminist praxis—to commit ourselves and to work to end heteropatriarchal institutional violence, beginning in Chican@ Studies and inclusive of all our myriad institutional roles. ¡Adelante!

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