

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Benchmarks, Personal and Collective

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This is a benchmark issue for *Chicana/Latina Studies*. It signals the transition of the journal's institutional home from Loyola Marymount University under the editorship of Karen Mary Davalos to the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) with Josie Méndez-Negrete joining as the journal's new lead editor and myself continuing as coeditor. While Davalos has completed her editorship with *Chicana/Latina Studies*, she will remain actively involved with the journal's leadership as a member of the National Advisory Board. Her report, published within this issue, provides an overview of her achievements and contributions to the journal, from fall 2003 to summer 2009. It offers an archive of her institutional memory, one designed to document and assist both past and potential contributors to the journal while also informing readers about the editor's role. Davalos' essay also represents the level of intellectual excellence and professional generosity that she has consistently brought to the journal. Her contributions, which have enriched both MALCS and the greater field of Chicana and Latina studies, were formally recognized at the 2009 Summer Institute with a Tortuga Award. In presenting the award, Nancy "Rusty" Barceló praised Davalos for successfully relaunching the organization's flagship journal and ushering it forward onto stronger ground through her steadfast dedication to solidifying the journal's reputation as a space of intellectual rigor and timely scholarly exchange. Indeed, as Davalos' report details, her editorial vision and feminist commitment bolstered the profile of the journal in measurable and concrete ways. The insistent staging of conversations

between scholars, artists, and activists clearly distinguishes *Chicana/Latina Studies* as the most truly interdisciplinary journal in the field. Notably, it is not just the contributions of the journal that are definitively feminist, but also the editorial style and practice. We recognize the lasting imprint that Davalos has left on the journal and affirm our commitment to continue the standards for excellence that she so passionately fostered under her editorship.

Because this is a transitional issue, three editors have directed the journal: the outgoing, the new, and the continuing. It reflects our shared critical interests and political investments, most especially concerning matters of violence, and gives testament to our work to create scholarship that reflects feminist practice. While we have collectively shaped this issue, each of us has also contributed a single-authored piece: as described above, Davalos reports and reflects on her work with the journal for the past seven years; Méndez-Negrete discusses her vision for the journal and moving it into its new home; and, as continuing editor, I provide an overview discussion of the contributing pieces to this issue. Making our editorial team debut, Méndez-Negrete and I, together, present highlights from the 2009 MALCS Summer Institute.

There are three rubrics under which we have organized the contributing pieces: 1) **Historia / Story**; 2) **Cargas y Dolor / Burdens, Injuries, and Wounds**; and 3) **Consejos y Sobrevivencias / Nurturing Comments and Sources of Survival**. Chicana/Latina identity is informed by the spectrum of violence that marks our history. The contributors' pieces for this issue together explore varied storehouses of knowledge, from lived experience to crafted research. Individually and collectively we embody knowledge and are living archives that emanate and create bodies of knowledge. As so many of the pieces in this issue illustrate, there is incredible intellectual worth, personal power, and benefit in

putting a magnifying glass to our wounds. Our featured artist, Anna-Marie Lopez, has spent much of her life struggling with depression and working through emotional battles with attempted suicide. In her artist's statement she positions her work as a means to breathe life into pain, to visually render her knowledge as a means of carving a path for individual and collective healing. As her cover artwork so powerfully exemplifies, Chicana/Latina studies is born working both *from* and *through* our wounds to create a better world for others as well as ourselves. Affirming the power of doing so, Lopez writes, "In my creative expression I find sanctuary that permits pain a language...A story unfolds in tongues never before allowed...My fury to translate and give life to silence... To finally witness my own voice." Significantly, the journal is precisely about carving just such a space for new and necessary languages.

The desire to offer a storehouse from which others might draw directs all of the pieces gathered in this issue. The issue begins with the section **Historia / Story** because of the foundational role history and storytelling play within Chicana/Latina studies and as launching points for engaging with matters of violence. The essays in this section illustrate a critical methodology that demands acknowledgment of individual histories as well as collective experience and show how such a methodology is paramount to understanding the context and scope of social history. Karen Mary Davalos' report provides an archive about her relaunching the journal from *Voces* to *C/LS*. As she writes, *C/LS* is "transforming what it means to be an interdisciplinary journal of note." Both Jennifer Nájera and Antonia Castañeda explore the ways personal and intellectual work are mutually informative and transformative. Nájera's essay shows the critical significance of maintaining faith in working from personal experience in the example of her decision to conduct research on her hometown of La Feria, Texas. She writes, "If I were to have insisted upon my original diachronic study,

I would have covered neither the history nor the contemporary aspects of race relations in La Feria with the depth that these stories and situations merited.” In her essay, “Comino Chronicles: A Tale of Tejana Migration,” Castañeda also works from an insistence on acknowledging the force of our intimate and cherished relationships to an analysis of history. Castañeda observes, “Wherever they migrated, Tejanas took comino seeds with them. Cominos were one of the elements with which they re-membered and created not only Tejana cuisine, but a Tejana cultural universe.” Castañeda explores the historical role of food, specifically comino, as a “connective tissue,” that brings together concerns about race, class, gender, labor, and women.

Mariela Nuñez-Janes and Andrea Robledo’s essay begins the section **Cargas y Dolor / Burdens, Injuries, and Wounds** by addressing the phenomena of passing on the wound within the realm of public culture. In “*Testimoniando: A Latina/Chicana Critical Feminist Approach to Racism on College Campuses*,” the authors explore the aftermath of an event staged by the Young Conservatives of Texas. Notably, their study focuses on how the event resonated not only for those directly involved, but also for those indirectly impacted but nevertheless traumatized for having been effectively rendered as cosurvivors in their feeling charged with a responsibility to assist others in absorbing and navigating traumatic events. The essay is further significant for the ways it pushes our thinking about the testimonio genre. As the authors write, “The testimonios we present here are not testaments to what happened during the event itself; rather, these testimonios are reflections and responses to the event and give witness to the climate of harm and fear resulting from Catch an Illegal Immigrant Day.” Emma Garcia’s essay, “Seriously Funny: A Critique of Hollywood’s Post-Colonial Gaze in the Work of Michele Serros,” continues an interrogation of stereotypes and their influence on the construction of identity. Her essay looks at the ways

Serros employs her writing to question the media and “the colonized perspectives that continuously presented Mexicans, queers, and working class people as lazy, perverse, and unintelligent.” As Garcia writes, “When one fixes any identity, a stagnation and limitation of identity occurs.” She reads Serros’ consistent refusal of strict parameters of identity as precisely what makes her work a decolonial project. Garcia concludes by touching upon the power of Serros’ work for college Latina/o student readers struggling to define themselves in all of their own complexities and contradictions. This is a critical maneuver that enacts what Nuñez-Janes and Robledo describe as the production of *consejos*, which they read as nurturing comments “imbued with *sabiduria* or intellectual knowledge generated from every-day learning.” The section concludes with Judith Flores Carmona’s poetry about the ways stereotypes inform social interaction and foster internalized colonization. “Today Tuesday” addresses a college professor who the poet persona recalls admonishing, “I warned you math is hard for all of your people.” She muses, “You cannot imagine that I might tell someone about your racist and sexist comments. / I am a brown woman, but not a silenced woman.” Carmona’s second poem, “Complicated Answer,” furthers this breaking of silence.

The section **Consejos y Sobrevivencias / Nurturing Comments and Sources of Survival** concentrates on the ways our burdens, injuries, and wounds must be acknowledged as a powerful, albeit painful, source of knowledge and strength. Mining our personal lives, most especially our traumatic experience, as a source for critical address is incredibly difficult. However, in our sharing of story and documenting of history, we discover that we are seldom ever alone in our experiences, no matter how frustrating, embarrassing, shameful, humiliating, etc., they may seem. Individualized forms of violence reflect absorbed conditions of social violence. Still, the witnessing we so freely give to others does not always easily translate into a confident speaking out about

our own lived experience of struggle. Typically, we are more inclined to readily acknowledge for others that which remains paralyzing to ourselves. The pieces in this concluding section illustrate these challenges and the hard-won triumph of learning to bear witness to one's own struggle. In her essay, "Dolor Hereditario," Veronica Pérez writes of her mother's surviving multiple rapes, the ensuing trauma, and their impact on mother-daughter relations. Of the importance of recognizing and then publicly speaking about her mother's unconsciously passing on her wounds, Pérez writes, "When one woman hurts, we all hurt. . . . My hope is that we can reach a point where instead of passing it on further, we can begin to heal and ensure that all of my mother's sacrifices were not in vain." In "Roller Derby," Lee Ann Epstein explores the ways private school shaped her sense of self and how the physical theater of full-body contact sport reoriented her thinking about how educational institutions powerfully direct and shape thinking about the female mind/body connection: "I left for high school with a deeply internally colonized outlook on how I should carry myself: attend church daily and diligently practice uniformity, obedience, and cleanliness." Of the empowerment provided by the physical and mental demands of roller derby performance, Epstein writes, "Understanding where my body was supposed to be was totally different from actually getting my body into the most strategic position." Further exploring this quest to gain clarity of feeling and thought, "The Wake-up Call," an essay published under the pseudonym Anónima, also explores the mind/body connection and what is lost when subsuming one to the other: "I have understood time and again that Latinas' bodies are constantly under surveillance and that our bodies need to be controlled and overpowered by the authorities, the state, at home, and even by our own selves." The essay narrates the author's struggle to bring balance to prioritizing her professional goals with her personal and emotional well-being.

As Davalos states in her report, at the 2009 MALCS Summer Institute in Las Cruces, New Mexico, a site committee member noted that approximately one-third of all the panels and workshops addressed the hostile atmosphere in higher education. As the pieces gathered together in this issue illustrate, academia is merely a microcosm for the larger social worlds we inhabit. We fiercely trace our histories and name their traumas so that we may identify the sources of our survival—our sobrevivencias.