

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Overview: MALCS Summer Institute

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The contributions gathered in this issue reflect the theme of the 2009 MALCS Summer Institute, “Border as Mirror: Negotiating the View from Here.” Scholar activists came together in Las Cruces, New Mexico, also known as the Land of Enchantment, to present their work in progress, to speak about and examine issues of social justice, and to carve out the direction of their work inside a collaborative and mentoring space, and to network as agents of change, sharing and building upon their knowledge in coalescence. The passion to know and the desire to document our people’s lives emerged within all the activities at the conference, beginning with a blessing by a representative of local indigenous peoples and then a reception that highlighted a female mariachi. The conference ended with a tour of El Paso, Texas, to witness the shared transnational spaces that these two cities engage as they deal with living alongside the border.

In her opening welcome, Elisa Huerta affirmed MALCS as a space of intellectual rigor and social activism and invited attendees to “engage in a respectful and loving way, challenge and talk to each other, and be open to new experiences.” She construed MALCS as a hard-fought space comprised of these challenges and spotlighted the journal as a place that exemplifies what it means for us to “engage in challenges, enter conversation and debate, and be the best writers we can be.” The conference site of Las Cruces represents an important nodal point in Chicana/Latina studies, one that encapsulates a

history of multilayered sociopolitical exchange and an activist commitment to address the spectrum of violence that informs Chicana/Latina identity. In their welcome notes, site committee co-chairs Cynthia Bejarano, Dulcinea Lara, and Mónica Torres write,

We would like for all of this year's participants to consider the past struggles our peoples have endured, to reflect on who we are as individuals and as a contemporary collective, to look through the mirror to what lies before us, and perhaps most importantly, to ask, how porous, how powerful, how negotiable are our borders. With all sincerity and respect, we pose these questions so that we can engage the ongoing question of alliance at this meeting. In this renewed historic moment of identity politics, it is perhaps time to review the history of Chicana/Indigena struggles and consider our current situation while looking to and shaping our future.

The Tortuga award represents an important moment of MALCS engaging in the reflective process of such acknowledgment. Provost Waded Cruzado, who opened up New Mexico State University, provided the transition space for UTSA to accept its new charge of producing and documenting the scholarly work of Chicanas/Latinas in the academy. For her work and her support, Provost Cruzado received a Tortuga Award, bestowed to those who embody the spirit of the turtle, carrying so much on their backs and so generously, tirelessly, passionately, and effectively giving their support so that we may thrive. Without the vision and patience of women such as Cruzado and Davalos, who endorse and underwrite our scholarly endeavors, the stability we need to endure and to create would be lost.

In editing this issue, we were struck by how the themes brought together here so organically stand in dialogue with the conversations staged at the recent MALCS Summer Institute, from the panels, plenaries, and noche de cultura, to the vendor exhibits, whose goods called to many of us as touchstones, talismans, or amulets. Among the books for purchase at the conference was the recently published and important chapbook, *Unidas We Heal: Testimonios of Mind/Body/Soul* (edited by Dolores Delgado Bernal et al.), by Latinas Telling Testimonios, a MALCS colectiva from the University of Utah—Veronica Pérez and Judith Carmona Flores’ pieces in this issue are taken and revised from that volume. The testimonio continues to manifest itself as a foundational genre to our scholarship and activism, all the while reflecting our dynamic qualities. The performances and arts’ events powerfully illustrated the spectrum of our declarations in content and form, also exemplified in the ways *Unidas We Heal* complicates and extends testimonio work in the groundbreaking *Telling to Live*. It is exciting to see the carving of new paths, which is something that makes each Summer Institute so profoundly energizing.

Notably, calls for justice and equity echoed throughout the various panels. Each plenary, from beginning to end, called to resist, subvert, and challenge the devaluation of women. In the first featured plenary session, “Femicidios and Violence Against Women,” Eva Arce, mother of Silvia Arce, a woman of Juárez killed in 1995, passionately called upon the audience to not only bear witness, but to do so critically, so as to leave the conference fully enraged and engaged in their commitment to end violence. Arce rallied against an apathetic and unjust system and called audience members to action:

I don’t know as to why, even when they have many options to investigate, they fail to follow lines of investigation... There are many

...and they have not looked...my daughter has not appeared...if my daughter is dead or alive...Nothing has been done...I want you to help us continue forward and fight for things to be resolved.

Two of the plenary panelists, Arce and Paula Flores, lost their daughters to violence yet continue to organize for the rights of young women in Juárez. At the plenary, they gave their testimonio and offered song and poetry to keep memory alive rather than buried in the sands of the Chihuahua desert. Speaking in Spanish that simultaneously was translated into English, these women of strength summoned us to never forget. As they talked about the ebbs and flows of their struggle, both pledged to continue their activism. Arce said, "The authorities could care less...all the money in the world won't be able to bring back my daughter." Others have been bought off with material goods, but she stated that "they cannot buy us...they have divided us and we are not working together...but with the space and the time you are giving we will surge forward."

Sylvia Arce! Sagrario Gonzalez! ¡Viven!

As they displayed their images, we heard of the shoddy investigations, the lost trails, and the soiled images of these young women. Their public pain became a call to change.

In an affirming and valuing account of these young women's lives, Lucha Castro, a Mexican attorney, spoke about law and policy changes that have come about because of the activism of those brave mothers who have not given up. Intimating as to the government's irresponsibility, Castro told those assembled that "they [have] deferred the investigation to mothers who have lost their daughters...fronting and charging scapegoats to further violate their

rights to know the truth.” She claimed that “efforts are steeped in negligence and corruption” as “evident in the various cold cases that cannot tell us who disappeared or the reasons for their disappearance, as the interests of those who wished them to disappear are veiled.” However, violence does not only plague third world countries. Rosalinda Fregoso offered:

[Gender violence] is a very grave problem at the international level; it is not only a problem of Latin America, but it is also a U.S.-problem. It is an epidemic...femicide cases have occurred in the nation... more than 500 cases have been documented that have not been resolved...Albuquerque...Los Angeles...San Diego.

According to Fregoso, “gender violence occurs...in the quotidian structure of misogyny,” and, as she emphasized, “much work has to be done around that.” To advance the argument, Cynthia Bejerano, site committee co-chair, and Fregoso have coedited the volume *Terrorizing Women* (forthcoming from Duke University Press). Given that the conference was held within the proximity of Ciudad Juárez and in a location where immigration remains a central concern for women, this plenary modeled a powerful and pertinent path for launching the Summer Institute.

Leadership was another theme central to the Institute. The panel “Leading by Modeling” addressed activist-oriented work from within the academy. Rusty Barceló, Waded Cruzado, Lupe Gallegos-Díaz, and Adriana Ayala spoke about Chicanas/Latinas in administration, demanding work with its own set of challenges. Barceló shared that within 3,000 institutions only fifty Latinas have been in the academy more than fifteen years. For her, it is imperative to have representation so that Chicanas/Latinas can be at the table. She says, “I

have no illusions that I am at the table only as long as I am in the room. What has helped make me a successful administrator is that sometimes being at the margins has allowed me to remain creative in my thinking.” Cruzado pointed out that administrators negotiate all the time, yet, she cautioned, “It is not enough to survive; it is imperative to also thrive. Too often we focus on the negative when maintaining the positive allows us to discover the power of transformative leadership.” Cruzado elaborated, “If you have ever been called defiant, incorrigible, unruly, rebellious, you are on the right track toward leadership. If you have never been called these things, there is yet time!” Gallegos-Diaz spoke about the lessons of home and from family mentors who helped her design strategies to be a strong advocate and activist. Among the skills she learned at home, Gallegos-Diaz identified respect to self and others, knowledge of multiple skills, financial management, and the ability to plan for the future. With these, she identified a constant need to reflect on the decisions she makes while remaining action-oriented, which, for her, is key to success. She sees her role as that of stepping stone, helping those affected to understand their role in keeping transformation in process: “We need to be clear about both our role and our mission.” Ayala shared that “regularly attending and participating in MALCS is what trained me to be in a position of administration. I witnessed how those in the organization handle themselves in business meetings, panels, workshops and how they held their own ideas and articulated them.” Of administrative work, she offered, “It is about the ganas of teaching others about education and bringing your constituency to the position.” As institutions of higher education become more financially constrained, it is even more paramount for us to be informed about the work of administration and our possible roles within its leadership.

In a roundtable session departing from Norma Alarcón’s concept of “life formation stories,” Rita Urquijo-Ruiz and Antonia Casteñeda observed that

“categories produced in the academy do not well account for our life formations. Urquijo-Ruiz began by asking, “How do we negotiate our life formations that lie at the center of our differences in struggle?” As a feminist historian, Castañeda reminded the audience that within the Chicano Movement assumptions about identity, background, education, and experience divide us. Also present, Barceló added outsider / insider discussion: “I didn’t look or sound the part, but I also saw there were other Chicanas like me, who did not have a certain name or speak a certain language. I wanted to learn how to navigate through the conflicts that separate us and that which we can address within the organization of MALCS.” Members of the audience added to her reflection, elaborating that the hurts and mistreatments we carry “project our own suffering onto others.” Another member asked, “How do we move forward even as we are engaging struggles?” Anxiety was expressed about the knowledge that comes when we pass intergenerational knowledge forward as wisdom. In terms of the huge generational gap that exists between mothers and daughters, an audience member asked, “How, then, do you negotiate your relationship in history?” Other audience members reiterated points made in the discussion of life formation stories as those present assessed their place in their own lives. The second plenary session, sponsored by the Women’s Indigenous Native Caucus, featuring Carrie Dann, Mattie Y. Foster, and Inés Hernández-Avila, continued the conversation about the significant role of the personal in carving a path toward political and social change.

Without the ways of knowing and doing embodied by our elders, our leaders, we cannot well cultivate and prepare ourselves for the kind of work—the fight and the struggle—represented by speakers on the third and final plenary session, “Defending Human Rights and the Challenges of Human Rights Defenders: U.S.-Mexico International Borders, Transborder and Transnational Possibilities.” Information not often available or even shared about social and cultural violence

emerged during this plenary on defending human rights. Margo Tamez exposed the ways in which anti-immigration activists and U.S. nativists foment hysteria against immigrants, claiming that their very presence is an attack on the culture of the nation. Through the efforts of anti-immigrant activists, various laws and new policies have been enacted. She offered examples of what has passed:

Four anti-immigrant initiatives...two amended the constitution, [denying the] right to bail...immigrants are held without bond... now deny immigrants the right to punitive damages...pay out-of-state tuition when not citizens...undocumented parents cannot take English classes...some are charged with aggravated identity theft and prosecuted for abetting their own crossing...Instead of arresting the smugglers, they arrested migrants for being their own coyote.

Throughout these four days, the focus on the creation of knowledge through activism and writing as lived and personal experiences were examined as ways of knowing and creating knowledge. In the *C/LS: Journal of MALCS* workshop, Davalos, López, and Méndez-Negrete looked back at the history of *C/LS* to expound upon its publication as feminist practice. Davalos outlined the process as she laid out her experience and tenure with the journal. She shocked the audience with information that “60% of the manuscripts that are not immediately accepted are not resubmitted or followed through.” López spoke about professional advancement in the publishing process, as she outlined key issues to consider when submitting a manuscript, emphasizing the need to know “your critical point of view and the foundation of your methodology. Be clear about how you are working to enter or build upon an existing conversation; citational footprints are important because they clarify this for both yourself and your readers. As so well evidenced in the journal’s pages and editorial

practice, none of us work in a vacuum.” She also emphasized the significance of the interdisciplinary nature of the journal: “creative work has to have critical scholarship.” Méndez-Negrete elaborated as she outlined her plans for *C/LS*. She proposed to continue building a collaborative scaffolding process whereby interns/undergraduates, the Colectiva, Editorial Board, and National Advisory Board create the shared practice of building a premier publication to document and expand its feminist practices.

Who has the right to know and what should be known informed several Institute panels that continued dialogue from past meetings. For instance, Sandra D. Garza expounded her examination of skin color, “not as a ranking” process but as lived knowledge that “rests on experience and meaning of skin color as an embodied process of becoming.” As Moraga coined, “It is theory in the flesh,” inside spaces and places that create “a polity of necessity to situate the female brown body at the center of the research.” Through Emma Pérez’ use of archeology and genealogy, Garza examines personal her/stories as “constructed narratives of race, class, and sexuality” to analyze her own subject position as she accounts for shared cocreation of knowledge. With Anzaldúa’s *facultad* as the interpretive tool or method of analysis, Garza engages deeper meanings of the “embodied knowledge of racialization...to tease out messages of skin color, as a positioned self with personal narrative to critique the racial project in South Texas.” As she frames it, this project is not neat and tidy; it is a messy process because she has to negotiate social power and her place inside it.

The injuries of race and class are central in the educational experience of Sylvia Mendoza. Her talk examined her own scholarly trajectory as a first-generation, college-educated Chicana, noting that she “learned how to behave, follow the rules, work well with others, and pass standardized tests...obtaining gold stars,” as evidence of domestication and a substandard education. Retrieval of

her memories of schooling has been an important process for Mendoza because “it breaks the bounds of self-blame or shame,” to contend with erasure and marginalization. Her own personal memories of schooling have allowed her “to examine others’ experiences as worthy of study.”

Other scholars who theorize education and leadership spoke about deficit and alternative models that frame the educational experiences of Chicanas. Chicana epistemologies and alternative approaches to teaching emerged as various panels examined the presence of immigrant children and their families, Spanish language heritage students, oral histories, testimonios, or what some may term “soft” or qualitative methodologies as research methods and designs. Gloria Cuádriz, continuing her path-breaking approach to research, presented an oral history inside a community history to discuss the case of Litchfield Park, a Goodyear company town in Arizona that disappeared with the production of cotton. Her work also focused on Belen Torres, teacher/administrator at Avondale Elementary from 1959 to 1999, who graduated as valedictorian from high school, while Lattie Coor, who is now President of ASU, was salutatorian. According to Cuádriz, this revisionist analysis is told to disrupt complicity with meritocracy, “as we examine what role we play in preserving the culture of inequality when the culture of schooling remains intact.”

Inspired, by each other’s scholarship and the hospitality of our host institution, New Mexico State University, MALCistas left with the commitment and pledge to continue struggling to humanize the academy and to create social change. This is a tremendous task to undertake, given the attacks our disciplines are facing in places such as Arizona and California as a result of economic strife. As scholar-activists, we aim to continue making our presence and knowledge visible, as we document and research the knowledge of and in our communities.