EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Coming into Voice: Transnational Flows and Transcultural Migrations

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There are many ways we are inspired to come into voice. Scholarly essay, music and song, creative writing, and visual art are sources of healing and modes of critical address. Adriana M. J. Garcia, in her artwork, brings a visual realism of the everyday struggles and strengths of Chicanas/Latinas. For her, "Understanding emotions increases the quality of our existence in the multicultural landscapes we occupy." She engages a discussion about personal and social migrations through a range of visual expression—murals, paintings, set designs. Garcia aims to capture emotional reciprocity, adding that, "Through my artwork and paintings I provide the viewer with a visual articulation of the emotions that surface as my journey unfolds." This fostering of affective response is important because it provides a powerful launching point for becoming more conscious and aware and, in the process, more critically involved with what informs our experiences, inspires us, and propels us into action.

In thinking about transnationalism and transculturation, we begin by honoring the makers of history and those who continue to place their safety on the line, such as the nine students who chained themselves to the Arizona State Capitol and the twelve DREAM Act students who were arrested on July 20, 2010, as well as all who continue to be involved in the struggle for immigration rights and actively take risks in order to carve out a better life for all of us. The works brought together in this issue illustrate how scholars, artists, and public

intellectuals produce work in conversation with the makers of history as a means to honor personal, critical, political, and/or artistic influences. Importantly, honoring is not simply or merely an act of veneration; significantly, it is a means to signal some of our most potent teachers and visionaries, the foundational texts in a curriculum of public pedagogy.

Cultures of denial, silence, and secrets have at times served to protect; these practices are not always linked to harboring those who harm others. Oftentimes, these cultural practices are carried out to guard the status of those without documents, such as to shield infants or children who find themselves growing up non-citizens of two nations—donde no somos ni de aquí, ni somos de allá. Our in/migration stories are replete with narratives of people who have survived against all odds, albeit wiser with the knowledge and insight to become cultural citizens who must fight for their own human rights, even when lacking the rights of citizenship. Speaking to the culture of secrets, in her bold and moving poem, "Confessions," Li Yun Alvarado portrays the specter of abortion within the poet persona's family history and the ways three generations of women wrestle with the issue of abortion; the poet persona refuses to cast judgment, and instead adamantly positions herself as a keeper of their testimonios and advocate of their sense of sovereignty over the female body: "I cradle their confessions / and will give my sister that money / I cannot not deny her."

In thinking about the empathy we must bring to reading family history, Josie recalls a particular point of memory about her own immigration narrative. As a small child sitting at the American Embassy with her Amá, she learned that there was no other alternative but to embrace silence and secrets when her parents were unable to post a $1,500 bond for each of two children—her six-year-old sister, Felisa, and herself—as evidence that they would not become charges of the government. Thus, to enter the United States, Josie was

instructed to pretend that she was her younger sister born in Weslaco, Texas. In those days when *Leave It to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best* delineated popular concepts of the ideal family, Josie recalls recognizing such policies as just another way to keep poor Mexicans out. Growing up, she learned to negotiate daily life as if balancing on jagged edges of glass: as a Mexican, as a member of an exploited ethnic group, as someone at times derided for owning her identity as a source of strength. The keeping of silence and secrets formed an integral part of the lessons geared toward learning to navigate subjectivity as a racialized, classed, and gendered person. For Josie, coming into voice means asserting cultural citizenship—the right to self-determination and the agency to act on behalf of our collective and individual rights.

Whether rooted in this land or as recent immigrants, attacks against Mexicans are not new. It is a cyclical dance between two nations that rely on each other's resources to progress. These two nations have colluded in making us surplus laborers to be recruited or discarded during times of war or in lean times when this nation's economy goes awry. The Bracero Program is one important example; notably, it is rarely recognized beyond masculinist notions of labor. In her essay, Luz María Gordillo documents the experiences of post-bracero Mexican female immigrants to Detroit, Michigan. According to her research,

> The end of the twentieth century clearly demonstrated that the city's population of Mexican immigrants had grown exponentially, and many of them were from San Ignacio. By 2000, an estimated 15,000 San Ignacians resided in the Detroit metropolitan area, mainly in southwest Detroit.[1] As the transnational community expanded with new arrivals, women's social networks—sustained by their productive and reproductive labor—remained the bedrock of the community.

Despite these migratory shifts, historically, conditions have continued toward increased ways of controlling workers' movement between these two nations—repatriation, operation wetback, and the-never-ending redadas that have now morphed into Arizona's Senate Bill 1070, with copycat propositions and bills emerging throughout many states—twenty-nine at the last count—following a xenophobic path that continues to target us as disposable bodies because of our appearance or the language we speak.

A twentieth-century incorporation into the United States, Arizona was part of the Mexican American War booty negotiated through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, and the Gadsden Purchase, which was ratified by the United States Congress, April 15, 1854. A territory for over fifty years, Congress would not entertain statehood for Arizona because there were too many Indians and Mexicans. It was not until Anglo migration shifted the demographics of the state that Arizona became the forty-eighth state of the Union, February 14, 1912—this was in the twentieth century. Now, as its 100th anniversary of statehood looms in front of us, it is not surprising to see fear mongering that targets Mexicans in a state that has historically feared our growth.

The politics of difference, or looking Mexican, driven by shifting demographics, along with calls to erase the state's ethnic history, targets the Mexican-descent population, taking us back to those racist pre-statehood times. It bears reiterating: Not surprisingly attacks against immigrants—and Mexicans in particular—have historically surfaced during times of war (we have two official ones going on) and during difficult economic times, targeting the very persons who keep our economy afloat with their willingness to work jobs others would not even imagine doing, as Mexicans take up agricultural and service jobs that have been racialized as theirs.

Josie was initially brought to the United States by her parents when she was an infant, and her undocumented status was kept hidden inside a culture of denial and compounded by the horrific home life in which she was socialized. It is her personal connection to the immigrant story that informs her narrative positioning on this war of difference: as a scholar activist and 'mojada' who benefited from immigration policy shifts and who recently became a citizen on April 15, 2010; as one who knows the psycho-emotional silence and impending deportation, albeit a welcome alternative to remaining inside a domestic war at home. These days, we are compelled to wage a war of position, where one must understand the forces of strength, and strategically act to change one's environment without solely acting on ideological premises. We must refuse to stay hidden in the comfort of a global boycott but instead call for others to engage targeted efforts to hold the state of Arizona accountable for the rights of all its residents regardless of status. We must enact our cultural citizenship through social learning in liberatory educational practices that empower others to create change, beginning at the individual level. We offer our testimonios in the spirit of resistance and solidarity, and in recognition that we have not been the only ones and we have never been alone. In unity, we create the possibilities for survival.

Notably, our survival depends on coming into voice, documenting history, and examining our wounds, those that have resulted from our political struggles and those that have festered within our families and communities as well as those kept close to the bone and harbored within the lone self. In her testimonio piece, "Secret Keeper," Monica Garcia articulates the scope of such wounds and their impact on her life: "All the secrets and the burdens that come with them are and will always be inscribed in my body and memory.... As the carrier of secrets, I am the designated heart of the family, holding things inside me that no one else must keep but that everyone needs kept." While secrets themselves are not always necessarily destructive, being the keeper of secrets undoubtedly places one in an emotionally fraught role.

In her work on critical witnessing, Tiffany affirms that it is when we summon the courage needed to examine secrets that we become most empowered. We thus propel secrets to migrate from subterranean, and potentially shameful, spaces into an open arena of disclosure, where we can examine them for the complex roles they play in our lives, where we may bring a critical—and hopefully empathetic—eye to seeing what brought these secrets into our lives and what investments we had in keeping them. In her poetic story, "El Llorón," Yovani Flores presents the portrait of a daughter remembering the daily gifts her father shared with his children. The story is poignant because it presents such a vivid and loving snapshot while also showing the scars: "Of our family history, we learned that as a child Papi had endured beatings…it was hard to imagine that Papi would eventually become a damaged version of his own father." As Cherríe Moraga reminds us, we must touch the wound in order to heal. Scars vividly mark the signal points on that journey.

Migrations and Trajectories

In thinking about the state of the field of ethnic studies, another area in which our very survival is under attack, Tiffany's focus turns to the various stages on which we work and how we use them to create and maintain channels of access—for our selves and our students, as well as our communities—especially during this cultural moment in which channels of access, specifically the arts and education, are being compromised and restricted. As someone educated on the last wave of affirmative action and therefore the beneficiary of concerted activism to expand access in education and the arts, Tiffany has felt charged throughout her career to pass on the legacy of this work and further cultivate channels of access. Examples of efforts to perform such work include involvement in mentoring programs, recruitment, and outreach. Yet, despite real and measurable gains, so much of the work and the advancements we have made feel like they hang on a precipice.

In recent lectures, Moraga has frankly declared, "I am afraid because I know in my lifetime I will not see the worst." The recent financial crisis within the University of California and higher education nationwide, along with the legislative assault in Arizona against immigration and the teaching of ethnic studies, demands our asking some crucial questions: In the next ten years, who will be the students in our classrooms, period, let alone our classes on Chicana and Latina feminist and cultural studies? Who will comprise the next generation of scholars, activists, and artists? What will become the formal training ground for the forging of critical literacy and the making of social change?

Elisa Facio engages concepts drawn from the work of Gloria E. Anzaldúa to discuss the ways in which Chicanas/Latinas still find themselves negotiating space in the academy. In her essay, Facio considers personal migrations in the field of sociology. She offers, "Given that the social sciences have marginalized Anzaldúa's writings, identifying them primarily as literary works, many Chicana sociologists hesitate to establish a relationship of intellectual reciprocity." Thus, for Facio:

> The challenge for Chicana sociologists has been to write for the academy, meaning to think and conceptualize within a white, heterosexual western framework. Whether Chicana sociologists meet the expectations of the colonial mantra of publish or perish is not even a consideration.

To contextualize further a discussion about channels of access in education, Tiffany shares important statistics and demographics: The highest numbers of Latinas/os in any state within the United States are within California, where 40 percent of the population is Latina/o. According to the California Department of Education, high school drop out rates for Hispanics hover at 25 percent.

Nationwide 66 percent of Hispanics who graduate from high school go directly to college; yet, of all high school completers (which include those who go to college after community college or as older reentry students) only 18 percent graduate with a bachelor's degree. More than any other major racial or ethnic group, Latinas/os are less likely to attend a four-year college or university. They are more likely to be enrolled in community colleges and more likely to be older students. This is alarming data because studies show that these students are also less likely to earn their bachelor's degrees than their peers who begin attending four-year institutions immediately upon completion of high school.[2]

The University of California at Riverside (UCR), where Tiffany has been on faculty since 1995, ranks third nationwide among research universities for its diversity. UCR's overall student population is 34 percent underrepresented minorities, and Latinas/os comprise 26 percent of its undergraduates, formally designating it a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Eight percent of its graduate students are Latina/o. For the past fifteen years, Tiffany, along with Alicia Arrizon, has constituted one of the only two Latina faculty members in the humanities. When a colleague inquired about the number of faculty women of color at the level of associate or full professor—the ranks that recognize the long-term placement of faculty in established and influential leadership and governance positions—she learned that the numbers discerned were so negligible that no formal data was available. Tiffany provides these statistics because they clearly show the end results when channels of access are not consistently maintained and furthered. Tiffany wonders, if she is the product of the last wave of affirmative action programs in public higher education and presently represents only one of less than a handful of Latina/o faculty in the humanities at UCR—an HSI in California—what is to be the future growth of Latina/o students, faculty, and artists without ongoing formalized efforts and with the rising costs of education across the board, portending reduced opportunities at every level?

Notably, Latina/o college students have higher levels of unmet need after receiving financial aid. National Public Radio recently featured a story about University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), student Diego Sepulveda as representing a growing number of homeless undergraduates who because of unmet financial need are unable to shoulder the burden of paying for housing and food after tuition and fees.[3] They find creative ways to survive to achieve their American dream of completing a college education. They sleep in libraries and mooch couch space from friends, shower in the school gym, and turn to food banks. This crisis largely festers in silence as most students find such circumstances unspeakable. Here, Tiffany deliberately invokes the term unspeakable from trauma studies because it emphasizes how this generation of Latina/o students does not yet fully possess the language to name, describe, and therefore work to change the latest incarnations of their oppression. The number of homeless students at UCLA has grown to the point that staff created a food closet where students can have access to dry goods and toiletries. And, alarmingly, many of us have had to assist students in similar or approximate situations.

In the performative spaces of protest rallies and town hall meetings that UCR students have created to share their and their families' stories of struggle facing exponentially rising college fees, Tiffany has witnessed countless students emotionally testify that in high school they thought their family was firmly middle class. However, the increased burdens these students have seen their families shoulder due to economic recession and the steep rise in college costs lead them to conclude that their families have fallen to the status of the working poor. They have also quickly realized it will be miraculous if they finish their college education and it is very likely that younger siblings will not be able to attend the university unless great systemic changes occur to make education more accessible and affordable. The university as a channel of access is being curtailed before our very eyes.

Still, financial access to higher education is only part of the problem. Once enrolled, Chicanas continue to confront marginalization. Lack of representation in the curriculum often leads to alienation and dehumanization. In her book review of Anna Marie Sandoval's *Toward a Latina Feminism of the Americas: Repression and Resistance in Chicana and Mexican Literature*, Sandra K. Soto emphasizes: "Like so many first-generation Chicana college students who struggle to find their way through an alienating environment, Sandoval's discovery of Chicana feminism and Chicana studies classes was absolutely life changing." These estrangements from the intellectual center not only deny us access to the language and culture of the academy, but also make invisible the contributions we have made to society. In her review of Guisela Latorre's *Walls of Empowerment: Chicana/o Indigenist Murals of California*, Constance Cortez acknowledges how Latorre's work bridges our stories as told through visual expression to our active positions in the historical narrative. She writes, "The early presence of Indigenist aesthetics not only helped later artists to promote *la causa* in the 1960s and 1970s, but also underlined the long-standing presence of Chicana/os within the United States." Thus, visual arts and murals facilitate the telling of our stories as well as collective action. These recent critical works offer significant contributions. For if we do not cultivate the language to clearly and fully articulate and describe the history of our oppression and resistance in the stories we, ourselves, create and tell, how can we expect to expand channels of access?

None of us came to this nation to take what isn't ours. Some of us are here through no choice of our own. Most of us have made this nation our home, and have taken ownership by becoming involved and invested in the creation of a better community. Human rights and cultural citizenship go hand in hand and ensure our rights to act—¡aquí estamos y nos quedamos!

Notes

[1] Aguilar, Louis. "Mexicans Bolster a Corner of Detroit." *Detroit News*. 6 March 2005. The 2000 U.S. Census reported 47,167 "people of Spanish Language" in Detroit, 33,143 of whom were Mexicans. If the estimate of 15,000 San Ignacians were accurate, then about 45 percent of Mexicans in the city would be from that town. All these numbers, however, are probably too low, given that thousands of Mexicans are rendered socially invisible by their undocumented status. Members of the community sometimes cite much higher numbers. A *New York Times* article from 2000 quotes María Elena Rodríguez, president of the Mexican Town Community Development Corporation and a longtime resident of Detroit, saying that, "More than 40,000 of the people that live in southwest Detroit are either from Jalisco [state] or have relatives there." Nichole M. Christian. "Detroit Journal: Mexican Immigrants Lead a Revival." *New York Times*. 21 May 2000. In 2006 the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey reported 39,885 Mexicans in Detroit. It is likely that a substantial proportion of them are from San Ignacio, but exact numbers are not available.

[2] All statistics here are taken from a research report published by the University of Southern California PEW Hispanic Center, "Hispanic College Enrollment: Less Intensive and Less Heavily Subsidized." While the data is drawn from a 2004 report, present numbers remain consistent.

[3] "College Students Hide Hunger, Homelessness" by Gloria Hillard. National Public Radio. July 27, 2010.