

## EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

### Ni de aquí, ni de allá: Surviving on the Edge

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Ideologies about belonging and the right to cultural citizenship continue to frame our public discourse with debates focusing on whether Mexicans fit into the dominant American imaginary of the United States. Views on immigration continue to be informed by social policy, current politics, and cultural climate, all set within a particular historical nativist, eugenicist, and xenophobic legacy. Most recently, people of Mexican ancestry have been under attack by state policies such as SB 1070 that would usurp federal immigration laws. Also, the recently defeated re-configuration of the DREAM Act, and the ban of ethnic studies with HB 2281 in Arizona that would serve to further disconnect Mexican youth from their ancestry, denying us a historical past. Now, in Arizona and other states, the emphasis is on birthplace. A draconian shift targeting children born to Mexican undocumented immigrants is now in effect, even when it goes against the most sacrosanct of conservative values—the right to be born or the right to life. As anti-Mexican flames challenge citizenship by birth, per the Fourteenth Amendment, states such as Arizona, Texas, Georgia, Nebraska, Kentucky, and New Mexico have written and continue to propose state laws that target the presence of Mexicans in their respective boundaries, proposing legislation that scrutinizes immigration status of those presumed to be here illegally.

In our most recent editors' commentary for *Chicana/Latina Studies*, we noted,

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.

These sentiments continue to resonate throughout the readings in this volume, as our nation wages a psycho-emotional war with Mexicans because of a Manifest Destiny war of expansion—from sea to shining sea—that would incorporate Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and California, with portions of Kansas and Wyoming, according to the Mexican nation.

Mexican immigrants with or without documents have had to exist inside a complex and changing reality, since the incorporation of more than half of Mexico's territory, due to an ideology that imagined Mexicans as disposable workers, sources of cheap labor to be discarded when there is no longer need for them. Historically, U.S. employers have relied on back-door policies assuming extreme love and loyalty to Mexico whose citizens are perceived as not easily assimilated and only valued as cheap labor, not as potential U.S. citizens. As documented by the U.S. Dillingham Report of 1911, Mexican labor was necessary to build the nation, although their presence was used to exclude Eastern European and Asian immigrants. This report facilitated and recommended implementations such as the literacy requirement of 1917 to

reduce entry of Eastern Europeans—Polish to be exact. Yet, these policies were easily dismissed or adjusted to recruit and secure Mexican labor in the fields.

Because of the contiguous border between the United States and Mexico, Mexican workers have served as an expendable and convenient supply of labor. As the economy changes, so do our policies for importing or tolerating the presence of laborers from Mexico. For example, until the Great Depression of the 1930s, when as many as a million Mexicans were repatriated, regardless of citizenship, few restrictions were imposed on immigrant labor—legal or illegal (Acuña 2004). Writing about the Bracero Program in *Spiders in the House and Workers in the Field* (1970), Ernesto Galarza likened the process of importing Mexican workers to mechanical parts, or “as sprinkling systems of mechanized irrigation” (265) to be disposed of when no longer needed. Documenting the complexity of this agreement between two nations, Galarza observed that, as early as 1949, the Border Patrol was known for taking workers back across the border only to return with them as legalized braceros, with the right to work under the conditions of the two-nation agreement. Through oral histories and other documents, we have learned that in areas of the Southwest, such as Arizona, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents refrained from deporting illegal laborers when U.S. crops or products were in peril. In California, the INS abstained from deporting workers, so as not to disrupt harvesting or production. While in regions of the Midwest, such as Ohio, the INS stayed away from the fields, in Texas, it gave employers a blank check to hire workers without papers, as they either looked the other way or conducted timely raids when wages were due (Montejano 1987).

Immigration policy and the exploitation of workers is tantamount to social and cultural violence, whereby a strong nation wreaks havoc in the lives of those who have no recourse but to migrate for a better life, even when their

absence yields benefits to those who stay behind or death looms ahead. In my family's case, a twelve-dollar remittance during the late 1950s provided for my sister and me, when we lived with our great aunts and our parents worked the fields of South Texas. By word of mouth, we learned that Mexican workers contributed to the coffers of our nation when they failed to claim income taxes, as well as added to Mexico's economic stability in the form of remittances, which in 2010 totaled \$21.27 billion, according to Bloomberg Businessweek and Fox News Latino. Most recently, as a result of the enforcement of employer sanctions and Mexican persecution, workers have begun their trek home, reducing revenues in ways that adversely impact the Mexican domestic economy and their economic survival.

The separation of families, reduction or lack of income, and the uncertain consequences for about 2.1 million youth who were brought to the United States as children adds to the post-traumatic uncertainty—neither from here nor from there—these youth face as a consequence of their status. Racist and classist practices of exclusion portend a future in shadows of service work and the informal economy for DREAMers who would be lawyers, medical doctors, teachers, or engineers. Must they continue to carry the burden of the worst paid jobs because of their racialized ethnicity and socioeconomic status? Hiding in the shadows, with the inability to obtain a driver's license in many states of the union, and working untimely hours for meager wages, without the right to continue their education or find employment with the education they obtained, their legal status places the dream on hold. After a protracted ten-year struggle, the DREAMers did not even gain a path to legalization. Though many supported the fight, we cannot ignore that the bill imposed emotional and financial burdens inside a process that at minimum could have taken a thirteen-year path filled with legal mines that were contingent on two years military service or college (Hing 2010). Refuting the myth that parents

of the DREAMers will flood our borders, Greg Siskind concluded that it could take as long as twenty years to immigrate a parent. He adds,

DREAM Act recipients must wait ten years in a non-immigrant conditional status to apply for a green card. The adjustment of status will probably take a year or so to get and then a person must wait three more years for citizenship (which could take a year to get). So we're talking about 15 years to citizenship in all likelihood. (Siskind 2010)

In the struggle for passage of the DREAM Act, sixteen students from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) participated in a hunger strike. U.S. citizens and undergraduates, Yasmina and Julio, spoke about their experience. Inside the contradictions of the struggle, they soon recognized the privilege that citizenship granted them. Yasmina elaborates:

I got involved because...connecting the issues—student, human, and education rights—in the midst of what it means to be living in 2010, on this side of the border, and the meaning of the privilege of birth...for the rights of 2.1 million that would benefit from this piece of legislation.... The forces that did not allow this legislation to pass are governed by a very racist and xenophobic system that go beyond Mexico and the United States.

In the process of waging their activism in favor of DREAM students, Yasmina and Julio recognized that, “We can do a lot more than we think...we learned to take care of our bodies and to take care of each other.” In the process, Yasmina found:

To not to be surprised by the amount of trust that people can

develop with each other...everyone who was part of it or stuck it out [the hunger strike]...it was more than this...it had to happen, and we were the vehicles for silence to be broken. We can't stay quiet forever. Change can only come from the movement.

Despite the contradiction that emerged by way of who had the right to lead, who could be the face of the story, along with issues of authenticity, these students placed their bodies on the line for what they perceived to be a human rights issue, despite some of our concerns for the use of starvation as a tool for activism. Even though this social policy did not affect most of the striking students directly, their choice to act on behalf of those who cannot or are unable to because of their undocumented status stands as evidence of coalitional activism. The actions they took raised their consciousness, gaining a new commitment to support the rights of students without documents, as they pledged to continue their activism on behalf of undocumented workers and those who stand to lose much, even if at the cost of their health and their lives. Those participating in the hunger strike acted to make a difference. For Yasmina, it was love-work or hanging on to the thread of fleeting hope, but hope nonetheless.

The work of Liliana Wilson, a Latina activist with roots in Chile, graces the cover page of our issue. Her art displays the global migration of humans, as well as other species that must continue to move to survive, with humans being the only ones who must contend with the geopolitical border crossing from one nation to the next. She illustrates river crossing with *El Adios*. *El Calvario*, *Niña en el Desierto*, and *Muerte en la Frontera* depict the culture of violence that is the everyday reality of women in the borderland. As *Denial* evidences, the choices of not seeing a signifier for the culture of silence becomes but a coping mechanism to deny assaults on women. In *Maize*

*Girl*, Wilson reclaims the indigeneity that connects us to one of the staples of our ancestral past, as she celebrates our heritage as workers and mestizas. For Wilson, art is a means of documenting the atrocities we survive, so we remember.

In her revisionist essay, “Reconsidering Jovita González’s Life, Letters, and Pre-1935 Folkloric Production: A Proto-Chicana’s Conscious Revolt Against Anglo Academic Patriarchy Via Linguistic Performance,” Dána Noreen Rivera rescues Jovita González from the colonial vestiges associated with anthropology, who by association carries the burden of her discipline. This is a type of cultural violence that extracts agency from an ancestral thinker who made visible the presence of Mexicans in nuanced ways that were not visible to Anglo or male gazes in her discipline. Rivera argues,

González demonstrates the ability to adapt to rhetorical situations and dominant modes of discourse, especially in discriminatory academic climates, personally and via her work. I position González as a subversive verbal performer capable of polyvalent speech acts in her correspondence and interviews with Anglo academics, in her presentations before the Texas Folklore Society and in her earlier folkloric production to problematize critical studies that question González’s ethnic allegiance and the subversive quality of her pre-1935 folklore.

Contextual knowledge and a feminist gaze further expand the ways in which we understand González’s intervention in the narration of a Mexican past, through Rivera’s analysis of her value and contributions.

Local and global issues bind our activism and ways of knowing. Globalization

of the market continues to impact Mexico's survival, as young women leave their families to venture into the borderlands to find employment in the maquilas as sort of urban braceras who become mere appendages of the electronics or production lines in which they must work to contribute to the support of their families en el interior de México. Irene Mata's essay, "Documenting Femicide: The Importance of Teaching Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada*," offers epistemological and pedagogical thoughts about the ways in which we are exposed to cultural and social violence, through an examination of *Señorita Extraviada* and *City of Dreams*. Mata says,

That among the multitude of available resources, Lourdes Portillo's *Señorita Extraviada* remains one of the most important tools in educating an unaware audience. The film bears witness to the violence that has escalated in a city under an accelerated process of globalization and the very complex relationships that exist between transnational business interests, the state agencies in charge of the murder investigations, and the community's activists. Read alongside the documentary *City of Dreams*, Portillo's film also reminds us of what is at stake when the preconceptions of a director overshadow the responsible representation of a documentary's subjects.

While the violence against these brown, fertile women continues to be perpetrated, we must necessarily cast an eye on the attacks experienced by women in their respective communities. Such documentaries avail us a view into the misogyny fueling the corrupt power that aims to keep women in their place as powerless and barely able to survive the economic oppression that pulls them to separate from their families, so as to contribute to their welfare. As we continue to examine women's daily lives, we expose the unequal distribution of power at all levels.



The lives of women and immigrants have been central throughout Josefina Lopez's writings. This issue features her recent play, *Detained in the Desert* (2010), which explores the lives of two people who find themselves in the desert, how they got there, and the impact the experience has on their thinking about immigration and the roles they play within the specific political landscape of Arizona. With this work, Lopez lends her voice to the struggle of those in Arizona working against the rhetoric of hate that has come to permeate the cultural landscape, from the legislature to the media. *Detained in the Desert* exposes the feelings of disenfranchisement fomented by radio pundits, inviting audiences to consider their loss of privilege, thereby underscoring the abundant sense of entitlement they assume at the expense of others.

As Gloria E. Anzaldúa affirms, "Knowledge makes one more aware...more conscious" (1999, 70). She describes writing as "an endless cycle of making worse, making it better, but always making meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be" (95). All of us bring into the creation of knowledge ways of knowing from our lived experiences, shared histories, and cultural memories, yet we do not always recognize it as epistemology, or we often dismiss our modes of understanding as theoretical. Rather than place in context multiple ways of knowing that are possible inside the experiences we live and survive, we often continue to reproduce elitist notions that privilege theoretical or empirical knowledge in our scholarship. Every person is a theorist and practitioner.

November 4–6, 2010, the MALCS organization convened with the Society for the Study of Gloria E. Anzaldúa at "El Mundo Zurdo: An International Conference on Anzaldúan Thought and Art and Performance." The meeting took place at the downtown campus of the University of Texas, San Antonio. Over the course of the conference, papers celebrated and critically explored

the impact of her work. At the conference, *El Mundo Zurdo: Selected Works from the Meetings of The Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldúa, 2007 & 2009*, edited by Norma E. Cantú, Christina L. Gutiérrez, Norma Alarcón, and Rita E. Urquijo-Ruiz (2010), made its debut. The text reminded us to think about Gloria E. Anzaldúa and the lessons she brings and how we pass these on to others. The fundamental characteristics of Anzaldúan teaching and mentorship were discussed as transformative to our work on multiple fronts. For MALCS, this venue also availed a plenary that provided the organization with the space for ongoing conversation about our scholarly and activist work. In the spirit of Anzaldúa's writing, which is invested in exploring the force and impact of violence, particularly wounds inflicted from the dominant culture and from within Chicana/o culture, we continued to reflect on our work.

Toward that end Anzaldúa becomes a fountain of potent vocabulary, such as her oft-quoted metaphor for the U.S.-Mexican border as "*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 1987, 3). Her words signal the physical and emotional trauma from the violence historically evident in borderland spaces. Conceptually, *una cultura mestiza* describes a space dedicated to personal and cultural healing, where our voices and agency are actively fostered. Such vocabulary gives name and by doing so empowers us to read differently and therefore to act differently. It teaches us to define our wounds—historical, cultural, personal, physical, and emotional—and to speak clearly and frankly in documenting our struggles without bifurcating ways of knowing.

There are no sacred texts; for Anzaldúa: "Nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (1987, 79); "a new consciousness...comes from continual creative motion to keep breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (1987, 80). Thus, we aim to

practice editorial conocimientos through the staging of difficult and necessary conversations at our various meeting places, from the pages of the journal to the stages of our conferences. There are many significant ways Anzaldúan work resonates throughout the pages of *Chicana/Latina Studies*, not just in what we publish, but also in how we publish it. It is important to note that *Chicana/Latina Studies* is the only interdisciplinary and feminist Chicana or Latina studies journal of a professional scholarly organization, specifically *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*.

Notably, since its inception, the journal has published creative work alongside academic essays. In 1987, *Borderlands/La Frontera* set a benchmark in the definition of Chicana feminist scholarship. In our role as a flagship publication, we follow Anzaldúa's footprints in the imperative to understand our creative and critical voices as integral in the production of Chicana feminist writing as meaningful in their entirety, as we refrain from dichotomizing theory and practice. What happens in the academy also occurs in the everyday lives of Mexican immigrants and their descendants. We must make visible the injuries or wounds perpetrated on them. For example, find ways to expose the injustices against us, as with nine-year-old Brisenia Flores and Raul Junior Flores, her father, from Arivaca, Arizona, who were murdered by Shawna Forde in 2009, the founder of American Minutemen, and her three white supremacist and anti-immigrant vigilante accomplices (Anderson 2009). Unlike the story of Christina Taylor Green, who was murdered in Tucson, Arizona, when Representative Giffords was shot, Flores' story has yet to be broadly disseminated. Our activist work is not only to produce knowledge, but also in the actions we foment as an intellectual and scholarly site that incorporates all the spaces and places impacted by such xenophobic and hate-filled actions against our humanity, but also to make visible what is often naturalized under the call for legal behavior.

Elaborating on those who are relegated to the margins, Adelina Anthony's commentary asks that we also look at the relationship between sexism, racism, and homophobia. Also, Judith Flores Carmona reflects on her own trajectory as a Mexican immigrant without documents who is now a citizen. Flores Carmona takes us on a personal journey that speaks to a particular experience as an undocumented student. We also feature a DVD review of Virginia Grise and Irma Mayorga's, *The Panza Monologues* by theater studies scholar Patricia Herrera; the University of Texas Press has published the play. (Grise's play *blu* was a recent recipient of the Yale Drama Series Award. It is forthcoming in print as part of the publication series and a finalist for the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Latina/o Playwriting Award.) Tiffany Ana López also offers a review of *Women Who Rock: Making Scenes, Building Communities*, a 2011 University of Washington and Seattle University conference that highlighted both contemporary and past movements in and outside of Seattle by bringing together musicians, activists, writers, advocates, educators, and scholars to talk about questions of female representation and access for women within music scenes. The pages of this journal also include two book reviews. First, a review of AnaLouise Keating's, *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* by Catrióna Rueda Esquibel, who offers that the *Reader*

includes a timeline of Anzaldúa's life and a glossary of key terms. These are valuable tools both to those reading Anzaldúa for the first time as well as for advanced scholars, who will inevitably annotate and argue with some of the definitions. That is as it should be. This volume is recommended for undergraduate surveys and graduate seminars in literature, Latina/o Studies, gender and sexuality studies, and major authors.

Edén E. Torres examines *Postnationalism in Chicana/o Literature and Culture*,

by Ellie Hernández. Torres problematizes the conflicts of reconciling two theoretical points of departure—modernity and postmodernity—as theoretical devices for understanding history. She elaborates,

[C]omplexity has never been the sole domain of modernity or dare I say it, postmodernity. It has always existed—even in those earlier eras that young scholars now seem to view in rather uncomplicated ways. Perhaps they do this out of necessity in order to create useful comparisons between the past (a nationalist era), and the present (or post-whatever). While this may give short shrift to the process...it does facilitate an examination of ideological struggles in relation to differing political climates and cultural landscapes.

This issue evidences that scholars and activists who study the sociocultural worlds in which we interact continue to create knowledge in ways that speak to alternative possibilities. Within the pages of *Chicana/Latina Studies*, we aim to contextualize and create writing in conversations with the footprints we leave behind, with the hopes that future generations will continue to build on our past. It is our expectations that *Chicana/Latina Studies* persists in inspiring and motivating us to create a shared commitment to the public pedagogy and creative activism that feminist scholarship informs in all its forms. Because of the fiscal realities of the journal, all of us are keenly aware of the fragility of this project and conduct our work with a fierce sense of responsibility to the organization of MALCS and to the field of Chicana/Latina Studies itself.

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