

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Troubling Borders: Interrogating the Public and Private in Pain and in Love

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Rosa Linda Fregoso theorized that women's subordination in the family is premised "on the separation of the economic sphere of production from the domestic sphere of reproduction" (2003, 92), reminding us that such social division is endemic to patriarchal societies. Similarly, in his classic work on the sociological imagination, C. Wright Mills (1959) challenged us to ask, "How are private troubles public issues?" Although the tendency is to think about our private troubles as just that—the field of Chicana/Latina Studies is demarcated by its insistence that we understand our "private troubles" not only in terms of the social and structural forces shaping them, but to also understand the contradictions and "crises in institutional arrangements" underlying them. The scholarship and creative writing in this issue explores the simultaneity of Chicana and Latina experiences of migration and displacement, labor, class, sexuality, and embodiment. In many ways the material and structural oppressions that shape our lives do so at the most intimate levels. At the same time, it is at these most intimate and personal levels that we recognize, understand, negotiate, and resist those structures while we imagine and craft alternatives. The critical and creative work in these pages stages a conversation about the intricacies of power and the *concientización* with which we negotiate these in everyday life. In the Chicana feminist tradition of valuing multiple forms of knowing, thinking, and feeling, we have woven them together in ways that demonstrate the intersections and parallels between them.

Stephanie Fetta's essay, "Disability, Domestic Workers, and Disappearance in Octavio Solis' *Lydia*" argues that the play *Lydia* makes us confront "the edges of human vulnerability" and social invisibility. In *Lydia*, the audience is compelled to interrogate and wrestle with its experiences of race, gender, and physical disability. Resisting the comfort of a liberatory reading, Fetta challenges us to examine all that is troubling in the play, and her essay raises difficult questions that run through the rest of the issue: Who is worth loving? Who is worth saving? How do we understand the interstices of human suffering? Fetta suggests that the play offers us no resolution to this pain. The disruption of binary logic, while sometimes liberatory, can also be confounding. But this interrogation and disruption of binaries complicates facile notions of embodiment and allows us to examine the body as a continuum of multiple subject positions.

Juana María Rodríguez's performance poem "Brujería, The Queer Karaoke Remix" offers another kind of trouble, of the pleasures of subversion, rebellion, and of course, sex. While the fact that la "joven mocosa" is a fourteen-year-old might raise our protective impulses, the sheer joy of rebellion against respectability, decked out in "Payless high heels and puta-red lipstick" in a space where "spics and sluts and negro faggotry ruled the dance floor" is exhilarating. The power of brujería lies in its transformative potential, taking that which is given—those structures of marginalization—and making a community of pleasure, creating "un mundo nuevo—just for us."

M. Cristina Alcalde's essay, "Transformative Journeys: The Impact of First-Time Motherhood on Mexican Women's Migration Experiences in the US South" directs our attention to women who migrate to the United States, and once here, become mothers for the first time, as it examines how they negotiate transnational obligations to their families of origin. Based

on ethnographic field work and interviews that she conducted with women in a Kentucky town, Alcalde traces how their newfound roles as mothers complicate their decisions about work and their marital relationships, and how it changes their obligations to families across the border. Alcalde recognizes the durability of gender roles, suggesting that the constancy of heteropatriarchal ideologies of motherhood re-emerge and insinuate themselves, reinscribing a traditional and patriarchal rendering of family. A feminist troubling of the distinctions between private and public troubles, then, asks of us to revisit and critically examine the contradictions inherent within those borders.

Estrella Torrez's essay, "Translating Chicana Testimonios into Pedagogy for a White Midwestern Classroom," brings the discussion of embodiment to the college classroom. By integrating "pedagogy of love" with testimonio, she generates transformative bodies of knowledge that disrupt the teacher/learner binary. Pedagogy of love humanizes the relationships between students and faculty, thus challenging hegemonic university practices and the borders between faculty and students. Such pedagogies of love demonstrate that love is political, as it is in those intimate levels of awareness and consciousness where transformational models of knowledge can emerge.

Troubling the dominant paradigms that silence and dehumanize faculty and students of color is central to the transformative and empathetic pedagogies Torrez describes. This "entering the lives of others" takes love and vulnerability seriously and creates the radical empathy so necessary to our work (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983, 22). Norma Cantú's "Vida de Perro," an excerpt from her forthcoming novel, *Champú*, invites us into another life, that of Oreó, an independent, peripatetic perrita whose experiences are privileged by an omniscient narrator. Cantú decenters the people in the neighborhood

and puts the human and canine into a mutual relationship of caring and chisme. While humans may judge Oreo “por andar sola, de andariega,” she knows all their secrets. And while some of Oreo’s fondest memories are of roaming on her own, she also belongs to the community, though not as their property. Instead, the neighbors each feel responsible for her and chip in to rescue her from la perrera. It is important to realize too, that Oreo’s experiences are shaped by structural forces of class, race, and gender, just as much as la familia Sendejo, with whom she moves from Chicago to Laredo. Cantú leaves us with this insight, “Even dogs have a life story. And this one isn’t too bad.”

The space of our empathy for Oreo gives us room to trouble dominant models of individualism that obscure larger structures of both oppression and resistance. We are reminded that Oreo’s life—and by extension all of our lives—are worth living, and that homelessness, scarcity, and heartbreak are experiences in a continuum that also extends to include community, generosity, and happiness. Our lives, like Oreo’s, are worth saving and better yet, celebrating.

References

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