

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Intersectionality and the Continuous Struggle for Social Justice

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Intersectionality was front and center at this year's MALCS Summer Institute held at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, NM. The theme of the institute, "Honoring Our Intersectionality, Our Migrations Roots/Routes" was aptly appropriate, given the effects of globalization, war, human rights violations, and displacement. Plenary speakers, scholars, graduate and undergraduate students, university staff, artists, writers, and community activists addressed and strategized activist practices needed to continue the struggles for social justice. The organizers of the institute insistently focused our attention on multiple subject positions as sources for transformation and solidarity and, in doing so, challenged us to ask: how do we address and honor our lived intersectional experiences in order to propel activism and scholarship? Each of the plenaries, whether it was the presenters of "Transformational Actions: Indigenous Shifts of Resistance and Healing," or the "Working in Solidarity and Across Intersections of Identity," or "The Movement for Reproductive Justice in the Southwest" emphasized the need to connect theorizing about intersectionality with the ways in which we engage in strategic actions. A significant aspect of this year's institute included another milestone for MALCS, as this was the first time a long overdue plenary session was dedicated to the intersectional issues affecting transgender communities.

As we prepare this issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres*

Activas en Letras y Cambio Social, we reflect about how the work published in the pages of this journal serves in the struggle against intersectional forms of oppression. In what ways can Chicana feminist and Indigenous intellectual and creative production intervene in this state of affairs? We ask, what does it mean to take part in activist scholarship under conditions of violence, racism, classism, misogyny, heterosexism, and transphobia? In *Chicana/Latina Studies* scholars, poets, creative writers, artists, and book reviewers engage in critical work that reflects on, critiques, and analyzes the complexities of our lives through Chicana/Latina and Indigenous feminist lenses.

The essays in this issue, in very different ways, reveal how critical Chicana feminist and Indigenous intellectual work can intervene against national and transnational multiple forms of domination. That is, the art, essays, poetry, and book reviews show that the substance of creative symbolic productions and scholarship is significant because they are intellectual works engaged in political struggles and produced in the service of Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women's social, political, economic, and spiritual well-being.

In this vein, we first acknowledge the importance that artistic production plays in social justice movements and the endeavors of those who create art to critique systematic forms of subjugation. This issue features the art by Chicana artist, Linda Vallejo, whose forty-year career engages decolonial praxis and social change. Indeed, Karen Mary Davalos, in her essay "The Visual Arts of Linda Vallejo: Indigenous Spirituality, Indigenist Sensibility, and Emplacement," proposes that Vallejo's art offers artistic answers to the wounds of colonialism, patriarchy and suppression. Vallejo accomplishes this, according to Davalos, through a Chicana feminist decolonial artistic practice engaged with indigenous epistemologies and reimagining of Western and US normative aesthetic traditions and thought.

Similarly, by situating the significance of symbolic production in the articulation of decolonial critiques of violence and patriarchy on the México-US border, respectively, Lorna Pérez and Norma Valenzuela address historical and contemporary structural forms of oppression, misogyny, and the role of family in the reproduction of such dominant forces through the study of literature and film. Pérez analyzes Alicia Gaspar de Alba's novel *Dessert Blood* in her essay "Subjects of Terror: The Ethical Impulse in Alicia Gaspar de Alba's *Dessert Blood*." Whereas, Norma Valenzuela in her essay "The Devil Never Sleeps/El Diablo nunca duerme: El imaginario mexicano subvertido por una chicana" examines how Lourdes Portillo's film *El Diablo Nunca Duerme/The Devil Never Sleeps* creates a new transnational imaginary that explores the contradictions of the family within Mexican economic border structures. Both Pérez and Valenzuela's essays situate Chicana intellectual productions as activist interventions against transnational structural domination.

In this issue, we return to the publication of a scholarly article in Spanish, a practice initiated in the early years of the journal. The publication of scholarly essays in Spanish sheds light to the significance of literary and cultural criticism in Spanish. Along with a growing corpus of cultural writing in Spanish in the US, such cultural productions provide a link to literary and cultural productions in Latin America and Spain and acknowledges the large Spanish speaking public in the US.

An integral aspect of the civil rights and feminist movement was the struggle for access to education. Access, however, is not enough, according to a group of Chicana feminist scholars at a California State University campus. Educational practices capable of honoring Chicana/Latina students' subjectivities should (must) recognize students as whole beings, bringing

together mind, body, and spirit. Alejandra Gonzalez, Irene Lara, Carolina Prado, Sophia Lujan Rivera, and Carmen Rodriguez reflect on the theories and practices of “CuranderaScholarActivist” femtoring (a coined term illustrating feminist mentoring practices) at San Diego State University and what it means to engage in educational praxis praising the mind, body, and spirit. In their essay “Passing the Sage: Our Sacred Testimonio as CuranderaScholarActivists in Academia,” they articulate their vision of a decolonized university where the production of knowledge is participatory, spiritual, and in the service of social justice. This essay is a key example of critical feminist intellectual praxis and offers an innovative femtoring model that recognizes students’ wholeness.

We would also like to take this opportunity to celebrate the recognition of pioneer historian Professor Vicki Ruiz from the University of California, Irvine, who was recently honored as the 2014 recipient of the National Humanities Medal from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the President of the United States. In addition, National Advisory Board member, Arizona State University Professor Laura Tohe, was named as the Navajo Nation’s second-ever Poet Laureate.

Continuing the tradition to encourage MALCS members to submit their work for publication to *Chicana/Latina Studies*, we are pleased to report this year’s Writing Institute, facilitated by Dr. Josie Mendez Negrete, welcomed eight participants to the successful pre-conference workshop. In that vein, we want to acknowledge that Stephanie Fetta’s and Estrella Torrez’s respective articles, which appeared in last spring’s issue, and Gonzalez, Lara, Prado and Lujan Rivera’s in this issue resulted from their participation in previous workshops. As co-editors of the journal we also held an open plática for prospective authors and fielded questions about the review and production

process, which brought eight women to the session. We want to express our appreciation and gratitude to members of the National Advisory Board and the Editorial Board for their unrelenting work, support, and commitment to the scholarship and creative work by and about Chicana/Latinas and Indigenous women. Finally, the members of the MALCS Executive Committee and the Coordinating Committee deserve our praise and heartfelt thank-you's for all their work and dedication throughout the year. To all who support this collective endeavor, we say thank you.

In conclusion, we extend a special thanks to the 2015 Summer Institute Organizing committee: Rosa Isela Cervantes, Alma Rosa Silva-Bañuelos, Patricia M. Perea, Clara Bass, Noemí Gutiérrez, Frankie Flores, Yuriria Morales, Ranae Gray, Katrina Sweetland, Dayra Fallad, and Annette M. Rodriguez. The University of New Mexico's LGBTQ Resource Center and its leadership made the 2015 Summer Institute a success and memorable.

The name of our organization, *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*, is a testament to the political significance of Chicana/Latina/Indigenous scholarship, art, and symbolic production. We say it in our name; we are dedicated to *letras* (writing, creating, thinking) but in the service of larger social, political, and economic issues. We recognize that the work of the journal is only a small part in these larger political struggles, but it is one that, thanks to Chicana/Latina and Indigenous scholars and activists, makes a difference.