

EDITORS' COMMENTARY

Returning to the Tejas Borderlands: New Conocimiento for Social Change

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This year marks the twentieth anniversary of *Chicana/Latina Studies*, the journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS), an activist scholar organization created by Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous women of the Americas in 1982 at the height of conservative restoration politics that attacked working-class, Spanish-speaking, communities of color, including immigrant women and children. As daughters of working-class families and communities, MALCSistas produced scholarship that documented and interrogated the ways in which they and their communities resisted dehumanizing state and national policies. For fifteen years, these mujeres—often the first Chicana/Latina and Indigenous female sociologists, historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and literary scholars in their fields—organized MALCS institutes to nurture their authentic voices, cultivate new theories, and develop alternative methodologies in their respective fields, all while offering emotional support to claim their rightful place in heterosexist, patriarchal, and Eurocentric/colonialist institutions where they labored as lone scholars. *Chicana/Latina Studies*, formerly known as VOCES, emerged from this struggle to create an intersectional feminist archive that documents the intellectually fierce and vibrant voices of Chicana/Latina and Indigenous scholars doing “work that matters.”

Today, *Chicana/Latina Studies* continues to publish innovative, interdisciplinary work that bridges academia and communities of struggle through a nepantlera

vision that seeks to dismantle institutionalized violence in the academy and create greater access and equity for Chicana/Latina and Indigenous female scholars in community colleges and universities. This is particularly significant given the demographic shifts in this nation and the still-pervasive underrepresentation of Chicana/Latina scholars in the academy. This nepantlera vision also calls for us to take on the carga or charge of ensuring that our intellectual contributions remain relevant to our elders, children and youth, families, and communities who are affected by today's draconian policies reflective of a totalitarian regime that seeks to silence, if not, erase our very existence.

As a feminist journal dedicated to issues that impact Brown women within and across the continent, *Chicana/Latina Studies* supports the research, creative writing, and visual expressions of women breaking ground through decolonial self-inquiry and radical methodologies of knowledge creation. The journal also strives to foster future generations of artevistas, cultural workers, and activist scholars who will be unequivocally prepared to resist and transform the misogynist and white supremacist violence inflicted on our people. It is through this legacy of feminista praxis that *Chicana/Latina Studies* seeks to undo the damage of colonialist regimes—epistemically, politically, and culturally speaking—one page, one article, one issue at a time. We are humbled and honored to serve as editors of this premiere journal, particularly during this historical juncture.

As the journal moved from Arizona State University to the University of Texas at San Antonio over this past year, Tejanas and other women of color bore one violent arrebato after another, leaving us disoriented, angry, and afraid, yet strong in our resolve to resist and decolonize. For instance, upon his election, the President called for the construction of a 1,000-mile-long impenetrable concrete border wall that would run along Texas's southern border—a wall that

would further perpetuate economic violence, endanger the lives of migrants, and threaten the biodiversity that exists along this stretch. His promise to keep out “rapists and criminals” only emboldened his white supremacist voter base to publicly lash its vile racism, and at times, physically attack immigrants, Muslims, Blacks, and other people of color with impunity here and across the nation. In addition, Texas’s right-wing and Christian fundamentalist governor signed Senate Bill 4, which forced local governments and law enforcement agencies to do the work of federal immigration officers. Considered one of the most vicious anti-immigrant bills since Arizona’s SB 1070, this bill would give police officers the right to racially profile and request immigration papers. Agencies refusing to comply would be criminally charged and fined civil penalties. In response, immigrant rights organizations across the state mobilized massive campaigns against this racist measure that would impact women and children, particularly those suffering from domestic violence or sexual abuse. Some of the youngest protesters included Chicana/Latina teenagers who organized a quinceañera themed protest at the capitol wearing vibrant colored dresses and sashes that read “sin racismo.”

In addition, transgender women of color mobilized against Texas Senate Bill 3, the so-called bathroom bill that would require people to use school restrooms and facilities that match the sex assigned on their birth certificates. In an example of intersectional justice movements, immigrant and transgender activist groups fought against this legislation. At a time when transgender women of color contend with one of the highest homicide rates in this country, this legislative fight was also a fight for their lives (and continues to be so) as it brought attention to the ways that cis-heterosexism and transphobia continue to deprive our transgender sisters from employment, housing, healthcare, and a full life in which they are treated with dignity and respect.

As we prepared this issue, we rejoiced after a federal judge ruled that Arizona's ethnic studies ban was racially motivated and violated students' constitutional rights to an equitable education. This ruling is an important legal victory in the five-hundred-year struggle for epistemic justice—one that validates the histories, culture, and knowledge of Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Indigenous communities. As the incoming editors of *Chicana/Latina Studies*, we recognize its value as a critical intervention against these manifold systems of oppression through the creative and transformative production of knowledge it engenders.

The three scholarly contributions and the visual imagery in this issue engage in exactly these types of decolonial projects: they resist the impact of neoliberalism; interrogate restrictive axes of identity; and validate generational knowledge and trauma. With the onslaught of malevolent machinations driven by white supremacy, nativism, homophobia, and sexism emanating from the highest office in the country, the need to heal ourselves, to critique oppressive structures, and to validate the familial and communal wisdom delineated in these contributions elucidate ways to persevere and prevail during these relentlessly trying times. Together, they offer a much-needed refuge for our minds, bodies, and souls.

In her essay, Amanda Ellis sifts out the discourse of curanderismo threaded within post-Chicana/o Movement era Chicana Feminist literature. Drawing from Gloria Anzaldúa's assertion that art created amidst the borderlands has the ability to transform and heal, Ellis argues that a holistic, non-Western understanding of health and well-being further helps to read literary productions by Chicanas as "therapeutic, palliative, and reparative" as they work to deconstruct the cruel and punishing legacies of colonialism and neoliberalism. In particular, she looks to ire'ne lara silva's short story "duérmete" as illustrating this type of healing—of border arte-as-medicine.

Alma Itzé Flores fuses together portraiture and Chicana Feminisms to conceptualize muxerista portraiture, a qualitative methodological approach that fully narrates and explains the complexities of Chicana/Latina mother-daughter relationships and pedagogies. Inspired and influenced by her own mother's narrative, Flores locates points of convergence between these two approaches in order to fashion a dynamic methodological partnership that crafts portraits that honorably depicts the educational and life experiences of Chicanas. What results is "a *mestizaje* theory that blurs theoretical and methodological boundaries" (this issue, p.76).

The aesthetic interventions in the film *Mosquita y Mari* (2012), by Aurora Guerrero, and in the artwork by Dalila Paola Méndez, inspired Micaela Jamaica Díaz-Sánchez to delineate how these various works reimagine the sociological, political, cultural, and physical landscapes of Los Angeles to depict unconventional articulations of queer, immigrant, and working-class Latina positionalities. By emphasizing the integral relationship place and space have with these marginalized identities, Díaz-Sánchez argues these cultural producers enact Emma Pérez's "decolonial imaginary" to forefront the reciprocal relationship between the symbolic and physical elements of an economically and environmentally threatened urban environment and the racialized and gendered desires of queer women of color.

Coupled with the eight distinctive pieces in the creative writing section and the three book reviews that similarly express decolonized perspectives, this issue strikes a careful balance between intellectual imaginings and the corporeal materialities of Chicanas and Latinas. The collection of creative writing, for instance, merges prose, poetry and testimonios to recount the abjuration of Brown children, the pollution of water and soil, the disdain of the academy, as well as to venerate the revolutionary acts of nurturing and affection by Chicana mothers and grandmothers. Two of the books reviewed here reclaim and center the indigenous

knowledge, histories, and practices of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, debunking Eurocentric notions of governance, justice, and language.

Adorning these powerful selections is the work of Chicana artist, Nivia Gonzalez. A San Antonio native, Gonzalez's work was first featured in a gallery when she was only seventeen years old and is recognized world wide as the cover art for Sandra Cisneros' book, *The House on Mango Street*. Her artwork frequently features brown-skinned, smooth-edged, rounded women with downcast, closed eyes, a deliberate choice made to empower Chicanas emerging from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. A single mother to twin daughters, Gonzalez worked steadily in her thirties and forties, but suffered devastating injuries in a car accident at the age of fifty that rendered her painting hand immobile. After eight years of rehabilitation, she began to paint again, but the women she painted in these later years feature wide-open eyes, a change that reflected the new way she saw the world. Gonzalez's works are featured in this issue posthumously thanks to her gracious daughters, Regina Antelo and Selena Watson, as Gonzalez passed away this June at the age of seventy. Her daughters co-authored the artist statement, memorializing their mother as not only a talented, dedicated, and prolific artist, but also a caring parent, leader, and dedicated community member.

With *Chicana/Latina Studies* once again housed at the University of Texas at San Antonio, it seemed fitting to mark this return by accenting the work of one of the city's many emboldened mujeres who use their talents to reclaim, reimagine, and reaffirm Chicana feminist and indigenous epistemologies, but whose endeavors lack the recognition they merit. The vibrant and luminous *The Strength of Harvest* that graces our cover, and the content it enfold, collectively function to unlearn, critique, and dismantle unremitting colonial, imperial, misogynistic, xenophobic, and racist orthodoxies that besiege the lives of Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women. Situated in the heart of

downtown San Antonio, the *Chicana/Latina Studies* journal office is positioned within a predominantly Chicana/o and Latina/o city and state that is politically conservative; in a metropolitan area plagued by one of the nation's starkest rates of income disparity, segregated schooling and housing, educational attainment, and voter turnout. Yet we also sit amid legacies of activism, resilience, and engagement, at a Hispanic Serving Institution that was the first to offer a bachelor of arts in Mexican American Studies in the state with the largest number of Latino elected officials. As divined by Anzaldúa thirty years ago, we continue to work in a bicultural and bilingual city in a constant state of nepantla. Our inaugural effort to implement the journal's distinguishing feminist editorial practices and carry out its mission of publishing pioneering scholarship and artistic works by and about Chicanas/Latinas and Indigenous women using an array of scholarly, theoretical, and disciplinary approaches draws on and repurposes the tensions inherent in this space, attempting to cultivate a collective state of cononcimiento and re-suture Coyolxauqui for all Chicanas, Latinas and indigenous women.

Texas will continue to be the site of this unrelenting work, as the 2018 MALCS Summer Institute is scheduled to take place in El Paso, along the Texas-Mexico border. After a rejuvenating institute that brought together nearly 200 MALCS members in Sonoma, California this past July to forefront the hidden labor, voices, and bodies of Chicanas in both California and the nation, the membership voted to reunite along the Texas borderlands the following year. In Sonoma, about fifty different paper presentations, roundtables, workshops, and panels showcased the powerful knowledge production Chicanas, Latinas, and Indigenous women engage in through their acts of reclamation, affirmation, discovery, and healing. The three plenaries highlighted the labor of nine community activists, scholars, and professionals who use their passion, expertise, and generational pain and knowledge to articulate, resist, and undo

the damaging effects of colonial oppression. Crystal Galindo was the featured artist for this year's Institute. A graduate of Sonoma State University, Galindo often incorporates her own image in her artwork, challenging Eurocentric notions of beauty and body image, as well as negative imagery and rhetoric about Chicanas and Latinas. Inspired by the 2017 MALCS Tortuga Award winner, Alejandra Elenes, that "activism is our healing," and galvanized by the indomitability of MALCS Lifetime Achievement Award winner Olga Talamante to "resist and rebuild" during the volatile and repressive era heralded by the election of "number 45," we returned to our home spaces from MALCS fortified to do just that. We situate our efforts as the *Chicana/Latina Studies* editors to harness the resiliency, creativity, and intellect of our Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous hermanas as activist and productive. We also recognize the contested and contradictory terrain of Tejas and its literal and metaphoric borderlands as a fitting and necessary site for these endeavors.

The issue you read today—the thirty-first for the journal—is as much a reflection of our labor as it is a culmination of the energies, leadership, and dedication of its former editors: Alejandra Elenes, Gloria Cuádriz, Josie Méndez-Negrete, Tiffany Ann López, Karen Mary Davalos, and Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell. We humbly accept the mission you have entrusted us with and hope that the quality of the scholarship, artwork, and creative writing in this and in our subsequent issues, express our respect and gratitude for fashioning this exceptional and inimitable outlet.