

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Storytelling and Truthtelling in *Chicana/Latina Studies*

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As has often been stated by Chicana/x, Latina/x, and Indigenous women both before and after the establishment of *Chicana/Latina Studies*, there is incontrovertible power in telling one's own story, one's own truth. Perhaps, no story is more distinctive to the Latina/o/x experience than that of immigration.

Over the past two decades, contributors to *Chicana/Latina Studies* have published scholarship and creative works that address issues of immigration, transnationalism, and citizenship. These pieces honor the subjectivities and agency of the women, children, families, and communities that withstand and prosper amidst the colonial, imperial, capitalist, neoliberal, heteropatriarchal, and white supremacist conditions that are constitutive of U.S.-Mexico relations. (Indeed, it is this capricious and inequitable relationship that triggers immigration from the southern half of the hemisphere to its northern half.) In particular, *Chicana/Latina Studies* contributors have documented the ways women mother or maintain kinship from afar (de la Luz Ibarra 2019; Gordillo 2010; Marrun 2016); the ways women rebuild community and maintain cultural practices (Alcalde 2015; Gordillo 2010); the ways they assert motherhood as a human right (Baez 2016); and the ways they forge non-normative families as networks of support (Marrun 2016; Muñoz 2016; Yarbrow-Bejarano 2013). Scholars published in *Chicana/Latina Studies* also problematize the labor of immigrant women for the ways it is exploited, disposable, and/

or theorize the impact of neoliberalism and globalization on transnational labor (Alcalde 2015; de la Luz Ibarra 2019; Gordillo 2010; Muñoz 2016; Urquijo-Ruiz 2004). They similarly have interrogated how laboring Latina/x and Indigenous immigrant bodies are deemed disposable and abject (Alcalde 2015; Menchaca 2013; Ruiz 2019; Schmidt Camacho 2004; Urquijo-Ruiz 2004). They have examined how the border is depicted in art (Martin-Barron 2019) and how challenging this truth-telling and storytelling can be (Téllez 2005). It is a rich corpus of work that theorizes from the flesh in order to understand the trauma, repercussions, and resiliency in an immigrant's journey. Despite what might sit at the top of mainstream best seller book lists, the pages of *Chicana/Latina Studies* are a testament to the expertise of Chicana/Latina/Indigenous scholars to tell this particular story and truth, and we encourage all our readers to engage, cite, promote, and learn from both the lived experiences and theoretical conceptualizations that shape this important work.

An exemplar of the importance of narrating our own stories is the trailblazing book, *Diosa y hembra*, written by Martha P. Cotera over four decades ago. In this issue, we are honored to share a reflection of her momentous effort. Motivated by a desire to disrupt male-centric discourses of Chicano Civil Rights Movement histories and actions, Cotera drew on Aztec goddess genealogy and ancestral practices to document “five-hundred years of resistance by our women and men against anti-Indigenous Eurocentric patriarchal institutions created by colonialism in Mexico and in the United States (35).” As a trained bibliographer, Cotera writes that she hoped a better writer would pen this history and the emerging Chicana feminist epistemologies before she did, quipping that she had no illusions that her final product would be a best seller. What she did foresee, however, was how this tome would scaffold an area of study borne of a distinctive

gendered and raced experience that ultimately made this 36th issue of *Chicana/Latina Studies*—featuring three essays, six poems, two selections of creative non-fiction, and four book reviews—possible.

The three essays featured here derive their epistemological orientation from those firstly mapped out in *Diosa y hembra*. For instance, in “Transgressing Gender and Sexuality Roles of Mexican Folkloric Dance: Disidentification in Raíces de mi tierra’s 2013 Performance of ‘La mujer de colores,’” Marina V. Chavez explores the limits and possibilities of a staged choreography that narrates a courtship between two women set to a traditional ballet folklórico love story. Drawing on Chicana feminist critiques of México’s ballet folklórico as a tool of the state to propagate a national character rooted in a heteronormative mestizo identity, the premise of this essay mirrors Cotera’s impetus to rectify a one-sided historical chronicle. Chavez then couples this perspective with José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of disidentification (1999), claiming that while the lesbian lovers in this singular performance can be read as disrupting the “carefully guarded repertoire of the folklórico tradition,” because it was danced only one time by this U.S.-based student ballet folklórico dance group, it reveals both “the limits and possibilities of engaging folklórico as a cultural practice of resistance and community-building in the United States today” (53).

Maria Paula Chaves Daza’s essay, “Horizontal Contact Zones: Undocumented Latina Women’s Coalitional Practices During Katrina” similarly pairs a formative Chicana feminist theoretical notion with another analytical notion from literature and language studies. In her analysis of the ways undocumented Latinas navigated the devastation Hurricane Katrina wrought on New Orleans, Chaves Daza draws on Anzaldúa’s pivotal notion

of borderlands to recast Pratt's (1992) concept of the "contact zone"—which Pratt utilizes to delineate the asymmetrical relations between dominant and marginalized groups. Influenced by how Anzaldúa chronicles the standpoint of the *atravesados*, Chaves Daza suggests that a "horizontal contact zone" allows her to better trace the ways differently marginalized groups with similar flattened degrees of power interact with each other. With this concept, she is able to map out the ways Black and Latina/o/x individuals interacted and survived the impact of Hurricane Katrina.

In the autohistoria, "Conocimientos de una maestra: A Teacher's Path to Healing," Lisa Knecht Mendoza employs Anzaldúa's stages of *conocimiento* to candidly narrate and theorize how she moved through and learned from a series of tribulations that took her from a 17-year high school teaching career to an emerging scholar activist. The frank and vulnerable descriptions of her anguish, trauma, and subsequent fortitude masterfully illuminate Anzaldúa's shambolic and circuitous process towards spiritual healing, providing an accessible and relatable account of not only the various constructs of this prominent *teoría* (that adeptly echoes the Aztec deities *Cotera* heralds in her narrative), and also affirming the methodological value of autohistoria.

Re-tellings are similarly evident in the poetry and prose of the creative writing section. According to Creative Writing Editor Patricia Trujillo, a common thread across the prose and poems in this section are the ways the authors have remixed "memories, definitions, and familiar theories." These narratives are each bound within a set of circumstances that function to relay significance and meaning. For instance, in the essay, "South of Living," soulful reflections on a succession of both inconsequential and noteworthy interactions by author Kimberlee Pérez trace the author's journey as a mixed-race Chicana lesbian scholar. We also hear an unchanging tale in Rosanna

Alvarez's "Predatory Reciprocity and the Politics of Chingona Fierce," as she documents the endemic disproportional treatment of adjuncts by the academy. The series of anecdotes in this piece typify the frictions between the prevalent exploitative challenges of the author's livelihood and her determination to impact the lives of students of color. These re-tellings reposition the reader through time, place, and emotion.

This issue's four book reviews point to the fruits of Cotera's prescience, as these books each proffer dynamic applications of Chicana feminist thought and perspective. One book recasts Anzaldúa's concept of the borderlands into a "post-borderlandia" in order to forefront the ways gender non-conforming literary characters strive towards gender justice, making room for a broader range of gender variation within Chicana feminist scholarship. Another is an anthology that affirms the utility of Anzaldúan epistemology within the communication discipline, especially for communication scholars who recognize the social justice imperative in both personal and mass mediated communication practices. A third book examines the utility and meaning of La Virgen de Guadalupe for transnational women. While this divine female figure has become ubiquitous with Chicana identity, the findings of this ethnography reveal the multiple ways both Mexican and U.S.-based women with Mexican origins sustain a relationship with her that blends both Catholic and homegrown beliefs and practices. Lastly, a fourth book is a memoir that at times evokes La Virgen, too, but does so in order to complicate the sanctity of this symbol when women are subjected to sexual violence.

The memoir's author, Myriam Gurba, has recently garnered national attention as she is credited with initiating the conversation about better representation for Latinas/os/xs and Chicanas/os/xs in the book publishing industry by penning a review of a text that topped the best-seller list for

the first few months of this year. Gurba's merited caustic critique served to reiterate the pressing need for Latinas/os/xs and Chicanas/os/xs to represent ourselves and to archive our own lives. It is a mission *Chicana/Latina Studies* fulfills, as we seek to articulate and theorize the material and discursive realities that resonate with the experiences of Chicana/x, Latina/x, and Indigenous women in the Américas. Turn the page and you will see. Cite our contributors—you will uphold our voices. Share this issue—you will extend who hears us. Submit an essay, poem, short story, or review—you will ensure that we retain control over who tells our stories and our truths.

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