

## CHICANAS/LATINAS Y LAS NUEVAS GARRAS DEL IMPERIALISMO

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*This commentary was originally a plenary presentation for the 2003 MALCS Summer Institute and Conference in San Antonio, Texas. Plenary speakers were invited to address the past, present, and future of the organization and Chicanas/Latinas in the new century. Castañeda reflects on global conditions, the effects of the war in Iraq on Chicanas/Latinas, and on historical patterns of gendered and sexed imperialism.*

The title of this presentation registers two conditions. It signals the ways in which the new state violence is anything but new. Indeed, it has been refashioned, but is still the same *garras sucias*. (Here I use the noun “garras” in two ways: to mean talons or claws, and to mean clothes, or more specifically, tattered filthy rags.) It also signals that I think our lives as lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual, and transgendered women of color, and most especially of migrant, immigrant, poor and/or working-class women, are as much at stake now as they have ever been, in some ways, perhaps, even more so.

I say this from the location of my history as a Chicana/Tejana farmworker raised in a labor camp on an Indian reservation in the state of Washington. I became a historian to understand why Native women (American Indian and mestizas) are so hated, so devalued and despised that they could be and can be viciously raped, tortured, mutilated, killed, and dismembered with impunity.<sup>1</sup> My earliest consciousness of native women’s bodies as a site of history derives from the material and symbolic worlds of non-white subaltern communities in the Pacific Northwest of the late 1950s.<sup>2</sup> Here I refer most specifically to Chicano/Mexicano farm labor and American Indian communities living,

respectively, within economically, politically, racially, and socially designated spaces of labor camps and a Federal Indian Reservation on a larger land base that included part of the Yakama nation's homeland.<sup>3</sup> These and other questions deriving from this early awareness of sexual and other violence rooted in domination effected with soldiers, guns, and the military might of the colonial and national state, frame my work in Chicana history.

Reflecting upon the past, I am compelled to address the obliteration of gender and sexuality from public discourse, even as gender and heterosexist ideologies are pivotal in the geopolitics shaping the “new imperialism” and the “new world order.”<sup>4</sup> For those who live on the militarized U.S.-Mexico border, at the moment in Yananawa/San Antonio—center of the Payaya-Coahuilteco homeland, core of Aztlán, Chicano homeland/place of first migration; home of the Alamo, “Shrine of Texas freedom,” according to hegemonic national history—the gender politics of the present war in Iraq mirror those of all the wars that have fashioned and refashioned the history of the Americas for the last 500 years. From this historical space of intimate recognition, contradiction, and opposition, it becomes ever more critical to expose, oppose, and write/right the gendered and sexed politics of militarism and imperialism. Let me be clear.

Terrorism, militarism, and war masculinize the world, irrespective of how many women, including Chicanas/Latinas, lesbian or heterosexual, serve in the U.S. military, regardless of how many Muslim and Chechnyan women conduct suicide missions in the Middle East and Russia.<sup>5</sup> Using gender to justify war in the twenty-first century—bombing Afghanistan to “liberate” Afghan women from Afghan men, for example—recodes gendered hierarchies and relations of power that have sexualized conquest and justified European imperialism.<sup>6</sup> The gender and sexual politics of religious fundamentalism, whether in the name

of contemporary Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, continue to reify patriarchal, misogynist, and heterosexist structures of domination worldwide.

“Global capitalism,” our post-modern restructured economy, exploits the labor of men, women, and children within gendered and sexed divisions of labor and structures of power framed centuries ago (See Hu-DeHart 2003; Ibarra 2003; Livingston 2004).<sup>7</sup> In the “global market place” women and girls of color remain the target of brutal sexual violence and murder, only now in “free trade zones,” so horrifically evident in Juárez; fall prey to rape by human smugglers and “law enforcement” agents, including border patrols; are kept captive in homes as maids, housekeepers, and nannies in the “domestic economy of service.” The expanding markets in “sexual tourism” and “sexual slavery” are hugely profitable, global phenomena.<sup>8</sup>

The rapacity of capitalism is well documented, as is the brutality of war, even as both are occluded in public discussion, or sanitized in public media owned by a few conglomerates. What is deliberately obscured, denied, and erased, is the inseparability of the gendered and sexual politics that produced/reproduce the issues we live today: terrorism, war, and imperial hegemony. *Las garras nuevas del imperialismo* are anything but new.

In brief, contemporary gender hierarchies, adjusted for the post-modern, transnational world, are embedded in historical, racial, class, sexual, and political hierarchies and relations of power rooted in colonialism hardened in European and U.S. imperialism. These congeal still further in the “new world order” as the United States recasts earlier ideologies of manifest destiny, political pietism, and militarism with virulent patriotism and nationalism in which gender and sexuality are an ever bloody, contested ground.<sup>9</sup>

The “new” post-modern imperialism is no less brutal or violent than the imperialism that shaped the “modern” era. Then and now, Native women are the first objects, because we are objectified, of violence, assault, torture, and death. With few exceptions, critical essays and articles on Latinos in the current militarism and war against Iraq have addressed race, class, and immigration status, but have not specifically addressed gender or sexuality.<sup>10</sup> Let me briefly focus on Native women and the military in the war. Let me be cognizant of ironies and contradictions, to which I will return.

In the U.S. war against Iraq, the first five women killed, captured, and/or wounded were four women of color and one white woman; all five were working-class women, enacting their agency; they had joined to improve their economic and educational possibilities. Three of the five, Lori Piestewa, Shoshana Johnson, and Jessica Lynch, belonged to the 507 Maintenance Unit. Piestewa, a member of the Hopi tribe from Tuba City, Arizona, was extolled by Senator Tom Daschle as the first American Indian woman killed in war (Daschle 2003). She was in the same convoy in which Johnson and Lynch were captured on 23 March 2003. According to news reports, Piestewa’s father is Hopi, and her mother is Mexican (P. González 2003). Johnson, born in Panamá and raised in the United States, is black; her father learned of her capture while watching Telemundo, a Spanish-language television station. Single mothers, Piestewa and Johnson sought opportunities for themselves and their children. Melissa Valles, from Eagle Pass, who died from a gunshot wound in the abdomen in a non-combat situation on 9 July 2003, “had re-enlisted in the Army three times” (Castillo 2003). Analaura Esparza Gutiérrez, born in Monterrey, México, and raised in Houston, Texas, was killed later in a roadside bombing near Tikrit in early October 2003. Johnson’s family “Calls POW ‘Strong Individual,’ Kind, Popular” reported the *El Paso Times*; Valles, the “Eagle Pass soldier ‘Did a Great Act,’” affirmed the *San Antonio Express*

*News*, which also stated that Esparza Gutiérrez was a permanent resident who “had met all requirements to qualify for U.S. citizenship” (Kareem 2003a; Castillo 2003; Lozano 2003). Newspapers identify Valles as the “first Hispanic servicewoman” to die in Iraq (Castillo 2003). What about Piestewa and Johnson—were they not Latinas? (Information on the five women discussed in this paragraph is based on Lozano 2003; Mariscal 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e; Kareem 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; *U.S. News and World Report* 2003; Goff 2003; Hurst 2004; Flannery and Reid 2003; Belshaw 2003; P. González 2003; Shorey 2004; Castillo 2003).

Finally we look at Jessica Lynch. Military film footage of the Special Forces’ rescue of Lynch and Fox News converted this working-class white woman from West Virginia into the “poster girl for American resilience and camaraderie” (Younge 2003). British journalist Natasha Walter (2003), critical of the race and gender politics in this war, writes that “...the media were a lot less interested in the black and Native American colleagues of Lynch who were captured with her. The media prefer women who fit into a particular frame, and although the British didn’t have a Lynch, they still had their own brave, beautiful and white girl soldiers.” Also focusing on race and class in the U.S. military, journalist Gary Younge (2003) notes that Piestewa is “the other American face of this war, fought by a military whose ranks have been swelled by poor, non-white women.”

Jorge Mariscal has long argued the same point that Latinos and Latinas who “buy into the vision of military service as a short-cut to college or job training are simply looking for a way to grab a piece of the American Dream. But the reality of that Dream continues to be relatively distant for the Chicano/Mexicano community. More specifically, alternatives to military service available to Mexicano youth are significantly fewer than for other groups. Until this fact is understood, the fundamental injustice of Mexican and Chicano

youth dying to 'liberate' Iraq (or any other developing nation) cannot be fully grasped" (quoted in Mariscal, 2003a; Streisand 2003).

During the early days of the war, newspapers and the popular press were replete with stories about the number of Spanish-surnamed soldiers and marines killed or missing in action. Latinos are over represented in combat and supply units and more likely to be assigned hazardous duty (Pew Hispanic Center 2003; Kagan 2003; Mariscal 2003a/e). Vietnam revisited.

One major difference from Vietnam, however, is that now Latino citizens and non-citizens alike are swelling the ranks of the military. In earlier wars Latinos, always suspect citizens at best, joined the military both to improve their economic possibilities as well as to prove their loyalty to the United States. Now Latinos are joining the military to obtain U.S. citizenship (Schiller 2003; Connell and Zamichow 2003; Weiner 2003; Garza 2003).

While U.S. immigration policy criminalizes undocumented workers, and armed vigilante ranchers hunt and kill Mexican workers along the Mexico-Arizona border for sport, in July 2002 the Bush administration established a fast-track naturalization process for foreign recruits as part of the "war on terror." Green-card holders in the armed forces who entered after 9/11 would not have to wait three years to apply for citizenship, they could apply immediately. Most recently, on 2 July 2003 and 9 August 2003, respectively, 250 and 222 "fast-track" servicemen and women were sworn in as U.S. citizens aboard the USS Constellation in San Diego and the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt in Norfolk, Virginia (Olson 2004; *The San Diego Channel.com* 2003; Dolan 2003). As Mariscal notes, "initiatives for expedited citizenship have begun to proliferate. Two senators from Georgia, where the Latino population increased by 299.6% during the decade of the 1990s, introduced a bill that

would make posthumous citizenship automatic” (quoted in Mariscal 2003a). Latinos are guaranteed citizenship upon dying for the United States.

Articles abound: *U.S. News and World Report* touts “Latin Heroes”; *ArmyLink News* writes “Not Enough GI Joses” (Streisand 2003; Freedberg 1999). While Mariscal notes the racializing undertones of this approach, equally evident are the gendered and sexualized politics embedded in the reporting. Chicano/Latino cultures are constructed in masculinist, heterosexist terms. The *ArmyLink News*, referring to the large numbers of Spanish surnames in previous wars and military actions, concludes, “By these and many other measures, Hispanics are one of America’s more martially inclined ethnic groups” (quoted in Mariscal 2003a). This same masculinist notion of Latinos, Mariscal argues, has pervaded Pentagon recruiting efforts. Accordingly, during his tenure as Secretary of the Army in the Clinton administration, Louis Caldera, first-generation Mexican American and recently appointed President of the University of New Mexico, claimed that Hispanics were “predisposed” to military service while contending that the Army provided the “best education in the world” (quoted in Mariscal 2003a). Under Caldera’s watch the Pentagon launched a publicity campaign targeting the Hispanic market. More recently still, in May 2003, one army recruiter took the sign-up drive across the U.S.-Mexico international border. He showed up at Tijuana’s Technological High 261, in Baja California, Mexico, looking, he said, for two young men who expressed interest in the Army. Mexico protested U.S. encroachment on its sovereignty (Stevenson 2003).

In the current triumphalist, nationalist, interventionist, voraciously imperialistic period of U.S. history, militarism informs all aspects of our lives, economy, politics, and society; it increasingly shapes the lives of many in our communities. In particular, the lives of working-class, immigrant, and poor Latinas, lesbian or heterosexual, are at stake. Many in our communities have

few options; they join the military to obtain jobs and/or educational benefits, and become part of a war machine that relies on their labor to commit atrocities against other people of color worldwide. It is very possible that there are more Chicanas/Latinas in the military than in college. And if this is not the case today, the rising costs of state universities in California, Texas, and Illinois—three of the states with the largest populations of people of Mexican origin—could well assure it in the near future.

What future do Chicanas/Latinas envision, stake out, and enact in this time of war and global crises? History, and recent atrocities in Abu Ghraib Prison, reveal the ways in which gendered and sexualized forms of torture, humiliation, and dehumanization, no less than the rape of “enemy” women, are staples of militarism, war, and imperialism—in the past and in the present, in dirty-old and in brand-spanking-new, garras (Banerjee 2003; Buffa 2003/2004; Hersh 2004a/b). Shaping Chicana/Latina futures requires that we map historical and contemporary spaces of intimate recognition, contradiction, and opposition to militarism, war, and colonialism/imperialism. It requires, as Naomi Klein recently wrote, that we “... understand modern empire not as the purview of a single nation, no matter how powerful, but a global system of interlocking states, international institutions and corporations, an understanding that allowed us to build global networks in response...” (Klein 2004). A pivotal element of creating a just Chicana/Latina future is to build local, national, and global feminist networks that refuse injustice in all its forms. In our own organizations and in concert with women worldwide, we must actively, loudly, and consistently organize against contemporary politics and policies that produce and reproduce militarism, terrorism, war, and genocide, whether perpetrated in the name of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, or in that of democracy (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; LaDuke 2003; Norman 2003). We stake the future—and lives of all women—on the actions we take in the present.



### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term Native Women to mean women native to the landbase of the Americas. Native Women thus refers to American Indian women and to mestizas, whether Indomestiza, Afromestiza, or Asianmestiza. This commentary centers on Native American, Indomestiza, and Afromestiza women, most specifically on Chicanas/Latinas. For analysis and interpretation of Chicana history, see González 1999, 2003; Pérez 1999, 2003; Ruiz 1998; Castañeda 1992.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of Chicanas and regional history, specifically the Pacific Northwest, see Castañeda 2001 and 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Native Americans long resisted white incursion on their homeland, violent dispossession of homelands, and forced removal to Federal Indian Reservations throughout what has come to be known as the Pacific Northwest, the states of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The forced diaspora of the Pacific Northwest tribal peoples at the end of the "Indian Wars of 1847–1879" placed numerous groups, including the Yakama and the Paiutes, on the Yakama (spelled Yakima by non-Indians) Indian Reservation near Toppenish, Washington. See Schwantes 1996 and Paine 1959.

<sup>4</sup> Sections of this commentary are excerpted from Castañeda 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See Enloe 2000 and 1993; Curphey 2003; Walter 2003. For women's participation in suicide missions, see Steven Lee Myers, "Female Suicide Bombers Unnerve Russians," *New York Times* 7 August 2003:A1, A6; "First Palestinian Suicide Bomber," BBC News, 30 January 2002. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle\\_east/1787510.html](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1787510.html); "Women Suicide Bomber Rattles Israel," *The Hindu*: Online edition of India's National Newspaper, 29 January 2002, [www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/01/29/stories/2002012900641200.html](http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/01/29/stories/2002012900641200.html). For discussion of women in the Mujahedeen Khalq, see Elizabeth Rubin, "The Cult of Rajavi," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 July 2003: 26–31.

<sup>6</sup> Text of Laura Bush's Radio Address to the Nation on Brutality Against Afghan Women, Children, 17 November 2001. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/release/2001/11/20011117.html>; Michele Landsberg, "Bush Plays Politics While Afghan Women Suffer," *Toronto Star* 26 January 2002. [http://www.justicewomen.com/ws\\_bush\\_plays.html](http://www.justicewomen.com/ws_bush_plays.html).

<sup>7</sup> The brutal, unsolved murders of hundreds of young brown women in Juárez, Mexico, the "free trade zone" on the U.S.-Mexico border, where many of the them worked in maquiladoras (assembly plants) owned by U.S. companies, have been documented in newspaper accounts since they began in 1993. The work of Chicana/Latina writers, filmmakers, artists, journalists, activists, and scholars is pivotal to knowledge about the murders; to analysis of the murders

within the context of transnational gender, racial, and sexual terrorism; and to the fundraising and organizing efforts among the families of the young women, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. See numerous articles in Ramírez 2003 and Portillo 2001 as well as [http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/chavez/maqui\\_murders](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/chavez/maqui_murders) for information about the conference *The Maquiladora Murders or, Who Is Killing the Women of Juárez: An International Conference, Days of the Dead, 31 October-2 November* organized by Alicia Gaspar de Alba at UCLA. In addition, Veronica Castillo and Mujerartes, a ceramics collective and project of the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, created *Lamento por las mujeres de Juárez/Elegy for the Women of Juárez*, original works of ceramic art in memory of the women of Juárez. These were auctioned to raise funds for an organization that the families of the murdered women have created to keep the case before the public and to demand justice for their daughters.

<sup>8</sup> For critical analysis of sexual tourism and the global economy as manifest in the Caribbean, see Amalia Cabezas, "Between Love and Money: Sex, Tourism, and Citizenship in Cuba and the Dominican Republic," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 4 (summer 2004): 987-1017.

<sup>9</sup> For recent discussion of reproductive rights, domestic and national policy in the administration of President George W. Bush, see Editorial, "The War Against Women," *New York Times*, 12 January 2003, 14. For recent discussion of nationalism and race that explores the concept of the new "white" nationalism, see Ronald W. Walters, *White Nationalism, Black Interests: Conservative Public Policy and the Black Community* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003); and Carol M. Swain, *The New White Nationalism in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> For discussion of Latinas in the current war, see Jorge Mariscal 2003b and 2003c. See also Mariscal 1999, a fine collection and the first anthology of Chicana/Chicano writing on the Vietnam war.

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