

BOOK REVIEW

Piecing Together Our Colonial Pasts

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Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture: Looking through the Kaleidoscope. By Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez. Tucson: The University of Arizona, 2020. 159 pages. \$35.00 (paper).

Vanessa Fonseca-Chávez's *Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture: Looking through the Kaleidoscope* offers a timely examination of the political incongruities that continue to trouble the Chicana/o/x literary archive, especially as recovery projects and more recent publications continue to expand the archive. This temporally expansive study attends to the tensions between the Chicana/o/x literary archive's colonial and decolonial currents, which typically unsettle most attempts to wrangle its disparate contents into a stable, cohesive body of literature. In this way, Fonseca-Chávez's monograph dialogues well with scholarship that similarly pushes us to consider what pre-Chicana/o/x movement literature reveals about our present, including the work of scholars such as José F. Aranda, Jr., Karen R. Roybal, Alberto Varon, and Priscilla Solis Ybarra.

To grapple with these tensions in the archive, *Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture* proposes that we use the concept of the kaleidoscope as a metaphorical lens through which to view the many pieces, or "fragments," that comprise Chicana/o/x literature. Drawing on the work of feminist critics like Emma Pérez, Fonseca-Chávez argues that the critical method of the kaleidoscope allows us to acknowledge "the colonial ruptures that resulted in

the fragmentations of histories, identities, and cultures (8).” Fonseca-Chávez’s method seeks to help us better understand ourselves by revealing our complex relationships to coloniality, a necessary task for Chicanas/os/xs and Latinas/os/xs who must reconcile our often violent histories with our visions for decolonial futures. With four chapters that move from the colonial to the contemporary, Fonseca-Chávez traces how colonial legacies have simultaneously built and shifted the political underpinnings of Chicana/o/x literature over time and in different spaces, focusing on the U.S. Southwest.

The first two chapters, which focus on pre-Chicana/o/x movement literature and the impact of colonial legacies on Spanish and Mexican American identity formation in New Mexico and Texas, make particularly unique contributions to Chicana/o/x literary and cultural criticism. In chapter one, Fonseca-Chávez explores how people of Mexican descent have relied on literary and cultural representations of the colonizer Juan de Oñate to maintain a sense of communal Spanish identity, while too often obscuring historical nuances and replicating forms of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. The chapter demonstrates how certain ideologies, or “prisms,” within the kaleidoscope contribute to gaps in knowledge about the relationship between the past and the present. Following the same critical trajectory, chapter two assesses how recovered writings may not only shed light on the colonized status of people of Mexican descent in the Southwest, but also perpetuate colonial and patriarchal structures. Turning to the examples of Cleofas Jaramillo’s *Romance of a Little Village of Girl* (1955) and Jovita González’s *Dew on the Thorn* (1997), Fonseca-Chávez writes how critics of Chicana/o/x literature, not unlike Jaramillo and González, “also repeat colonial patterns of exclusion” (63) by creating genealogies or legacies premised on a particular vision of inclusion.

In chapters three and four, *Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture* shifts to contemporary literature and culture that more actively attempts to account for marginalized ways of knowing and being, looking to those parts of the kaleidoscope that dominant culture pushes to the periphery. Pointing to Emma Pérez's historical novel *Forgetting the Alamo, or, Blood Memory* (2009), for instance, Fonseca-Chávez shows how contemporary Chicana/o/x literature questions and promotes the dismantling of ongoing colonial violence by reinserting stories in the archive that speak to the experiences of people long excluded from the official record. Just as importantly, the final chapter relocates Fonseca-Chávez's discussion to the Arizona-Mexico borderlands, a region that receives little attention in Chicana/o/x literary criticism but remains a site where the lasting effects of coloniality are felt daily by border dwellers and crossers.

Overall, Fonseca-Chávez models well how scholars might analyze pre-Chicana/o/x movement literature alongside contemporary writings and issues to create a fuller picture of the settler colonial origins of the United States. Perhaps one of the greatest strengths of the book, too, is the way in which Fonseca-Chávez reminds us that maintaining a commitment to decolonial politics is not only possible but necessary today—an assertion that some critics in Chicana/o/x studies and the larger field of Latina/o/x studies dismiss as unrealistic. The personal memories and stories that Fonseca-Chávez weaves into her study further underscore the importance of renewing one's commitment to decoloniality, as they illustrate the implications of colonial violence on the ways we view the world and our place in it. Scholars and students of Southwestern history and literature, Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x studies, and feminist studies would all benefit from reading *Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture*.

