

EDITOR'S COMMENTARY

Theory as a Beacon of Hope

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2020 has not had a shortage of trauma, hardship, loss, and injustice. From a cataclysmic protean and inexorable virus that has—and will continue—to devastate Brown/Black/Indigenous communities, to repeated televised murders of Black and Brown men and women sanctioned by a white supremacist police state, to forced sterilizations of women of color directed by this nation's ongoing eugenics project—there is a litany of pain, wrongdoing, and despair that has made enduring these interminable crises at times unbearable. The abyssal depths of the cenotes. The amplitude of the remolinos. The seismic jolts of the arrebatos. The tortuous sustos. All have seemed insurmountable. Indeed, it often appeared unviable to attempt to anchor and restore oneself via trusted theoretical constructs—like an oppositional consciousness (Sandoval), a decolonial imaginary (Perez), a spiritual activism (Anzaldúa), or a world-traveling consciousness (Lugones)—all of which articulate the ability to imagine and manifest a more equitable, just, empathetic and peaceful world.

Visualizing another reality—especially through acute adversity—is the lifeline offered through these luminaries, even if at times it has felt impossible to reach out and grab hold.

One theorist in particular was a beacon for each of the four essays in this issue. Four contributors serendipitously turned to the work of Latina feminist philosopher and activist María Lugones to inform the transformative and healing projects published here. Lugones' death in June was yet another

misfortune endured this year. Yet, her invaluable contributions to the fields of philosophy, Chicana/Latina feminism, decolonial studies, gender and sexuality studies, and Latina/o/x studies transcend her earthly presence and continue to resound with the latest generation of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars.

For instance, Lugones' critique of an ethnocentric feminism that elides the different experiences of classed, racialized, and colonized women as a way minimize tensions (Lugones and Rosezelle 1995) informs the conceptualization of Ana Roncero-Bellido's "Latina Anónima," the transnational and translocal anonymous narrating subject used in the groundbreaking *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*. In an effort to address the tensions that arise in translating and translanguaging U.S.-based Latina/x feminist epistemologies to Latina/x women across the Americas, Roncero-Bellido centers the utility of this ambiguous yet familiar composite voice in building solidarity amongst women. Lugones' work is used to validate how the authors of *Telling to Live* acknowledged and navigated the power differentials and subsequent frictions that emerged as this group of mujeres with various Latinidades collaborated on this writing project, advancing Latina Anónima as a result of these negotiations.

Another of Lugones' theorizations influenced the analysis in "If Aristotle Had Cooked": Contemporary Feminist Practices within the Rhetoric of Young Latinas' Spoken Word Performances," by Nora K. Rivera. The spoken word performances of five Latina/x, Afro-Latina/x and Chicana/x spoken word poets are likened to "performed testimonios" a tradition of truth-telling and story-telling linked to the rhetoric of Sor Juana, various Indigenous rhetorical practices, and the testimonial methodologies of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars. The critiques of gender norms and expectations layered in the spoken word performances studied here are bolstered by two of Lugones' pivotal assertions. One is that gender is a

colonial construct that has enabled the exploitation and commodification of bodies and resources in colonized lands (2007), and the other is that the colonial difference between the worldviews and experiences of the colonized and the colonizer are irreducible (2010).

In “Dusmic Poetic of the Flesh: Decolonial Shifts in Puerto Rican Women’s Fiction,” Roberta Hurtado explores how Puerto Rican literature conceives of an existence unbidden from the demands and limitations of coloniality. She pairs Anzaldúa’s and Moraga’s “theory of the flesh” with Nuyorican poets Miguel Algarín’s and Miguel Piñero’s term “dusmic,” which conveys the discursive opposition to colonial ideologies their poems offer—to construct a “dusmic poetic of the flesh” in order to account for the coloniality of power that regulates and exploits Puerto Rican women’s subjectivity and the creative and productive ways they can imagine themselves outside of those restrictions. Hurtado underscores this imaginary by analyzing Blanca, the protagonist in Alba Albert’s novel *A Perfect Silence*, whose narrative arc fleshes out both the ravages of colonialism and the liberating potentialities activated when she begins to divest, resist, and unlearn those dehumanizing constraints. A key theoretical inspiration for the resistive property of this concept is Lugones’ notion of “world traveler consciousness” (2001), as it articulates a critical meta-awareness of the conditions of colonization that allows racialized, gendered, classed, and colonized bodies to understand themselves outside of those systems.

Author and artist Leslie Sotomayor likens her art-making to both Anzaldúa’s state of nepantla and Lugones’ conception of world traveling in “*Hilos Rojos: Threading Together an Autohistoria of Conocimiento*.” Sotomayor offers an autohistoria-teoría to document how the stages of *conocimiento* guided the production of

an art installation that helped her heal from both the end of a marriage sullied by deception and a taxing search of belonging in her mother's homeland. Each phase of *conocimiento* is depicted by a component of the art installation, and she chronicles a candid and vulnerable account of how she rendered the emotional, physical, and psychological pain of unlearning and transformation into visual representations. She writes that her self-awareness as an artist is ultimately changed after this experience, and she offers an understanding of herself as a *nepantla* artist who embraces this uncertain and transformative state of being in order to reimagine the worlds she will create with her art.

In this bleak, *casi* dystopian time that seems absent of hope and promise, these four essays beckon with Lugones' reassuring wisdom and summon the larger epistemologies of Chicana/x, Latina/x, Indígena, and Afro-Latina/x tenacity and resilience. They offer examples of solidarity across positionalities and borders; they confirm the value of raised voices; they depict the arduous work of transformation; and they hail the sentience *oprimidos* like Chicanas/xs, Latinas/xs, Indigenous peoples, and Afro-Latinas/xs draw on to uplift us through the grim work of renewal. They are an apt homage to Lugones' contributions to the field of Chicana/x and Latina/x studies.

The book reviews and creative writing in this issue are also potent reminders of our continued capacity to envision alternative ways to live, learn, and love, even through the dreariest of times.

For instance, the four books reviewed here imagine a world that is decolonial; one devoid of toxic masculinity; one that no longer stigmatizes the mentally ill; and one that offers more inclusive and just schooling.

Teaching Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Pedagogy and Practice for Our Classrooms and

Communities specifies numerous approaches to recasting the pedagogies, curriculum, and institutional practices of public schools so they create more inclusive and just environments. *Colonial Legacies in Chicana/o Literature and Culture: Looking through the Kaleidoscope* discusses not only the current decolonial political deliberations in the study of Chicana/o/x literature, but also argues for the need to reconcile brutal colonial histories and dismantle continuing colonial violence in order to aspire towards decolonial futures. Delinking from the violence of heteropatriarchy is the focus of *Decolonizing Latinx Masculinities*. The text reiterates the need to interrogate the historical and contemporary constructions of masculinity in order to clear the way for a masculine futurity that is liberated from capitalism, heteronormativity, gender binaries, and racism. Lastly, in *A Life on Hold: Living with Schizophrenia*—a personal narrative about a mother caring for her schizophrenic son and his struggle to live with his illness—the text calls to upend how mental illness is viewed and advocates for alternative holistic resources and treatment for mental health care.

In her selections for the Creative Writing section, Patricia Trujillo has assembled voices that both articulate the current onslaught of tribulations and channel the energies needed to reframe them as possibilities. This is the message behind the poem “Realm Shift” by Laura Rendón and the poem “The Week Ruth Bader Ginsberg Died” by acclaimed poet Lorna Dee Cervantes, as they encourage converting our anguish and anger into resistance. The supplication offered by Paula García in “A Chicana Prayer: What I Wish My Ancestors Would Have Told My Ancestors” imagines an exchange between Indigenous people of New Mexico and the mestizo descendants of the Spanish conquistadores that attempts to heal the centuries-old wounds inflicted by continued colonization, illustrating that such amends are still possible. The remaining four contributors center Afro-

Latinidad. Reid Gómez makes visible the African and Indigenous heritage often obscured or denied in both cultural products and in public discourse by unpacking the song “Cumbia de la boda” by La Sonora Dinamita y Los Bukis. Poems by Fabiola Bagula and Elizabeth Pérez each address colorism in Latino/x households. Other poems in Pérez’s collection reference syncretic Afro-Cuban and Catholic spiritual traditions, diaspora, migration, whiteness, and intersectionality. Lastly, this section features a multi-media contribution by Ginger “Dizzy” Jenkins. It includes: 1) the lyrics to “Agua de esclavo,” an original Bomba composition—a Puerto-Rican musical style rooted in both the island’s Indigenous Taíno and African slave population; 2) a testimonio about the lyrics and motivation for this piece; and 3) an audio file of this song that is available at the *Chicana/Latina Studies* website (journal.malcs.org). Together, these components untangle Eurocentric ideologies about natural hair and the complicated relationship and connection to water and the sea of many Caribbean peoples. This dozen of inspired cultural works transport us to an interconnected, healed, and non-hierarchical world that recharges us for the one still struggling to find its equilibrium.

Interspersed among these mujeres de letras is the work of portraitist Crystal Galindo. A Yaqui-Xicana artist originally from California, she has forged a path in the art world with her life-like self-portraits set amidst fanciful and imagined words. Her vision allows muxeres to see their authentic selves validated in vibrant spaces rife with their histories and ways of knowing.

In our collective struggle to both survive and remake the damaged and noxious parts of our world, we hope the visions and foresight of the Chicana/Latina theoretical interventions, creative imaginings, and painted likenesses published in this issue offer respite, courage and hope.