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University of Nevada, Reno

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HOTEL MARIACHI

Elena Avilés 7

LA LUCHA SIGUE: THE LEGACY AND LESSONS OF GLORIA ANZALDÚA FOR LATINAS IN ACADEMIA

Melissa Castillo-Garsow 11

IDENTIDAD VIAJERA: LA MEXICANIDAD DE ROSARIO SANORES EN SU POESÍA TRANSNACIONAL

Ruskin Chádez 34

DON CHETO, “EL CRONISTA DEL PUEBLO”: UNA REACTUALIZACIÓN DEL MITO DEL “DON” Y VALIDACIÓN DE UNA MEMORIA COLECTIVA DE LA COMUNIDAD MEXICANA TRANSNACIONAL EN ESTADOS UNIDOS

Esther Díaz Martín 55

BARBACOA

Blanca García-Jenkins 76

SOUTHWEST URBANISM: THE EVOLUTION OF MEXICAN URBAN LANDSCAPES IN THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

Moises Gonzales 78

LA SECRETARY

Luz María Gordillo 98

TESTIMONIO, ACTIVISM AND CHICANA/O-LATINA/O HISTORIOGRAPHY: NARRATIVIZING BERT CORONA’S MEMORIES

David Manuel Hernández 103

LATINAS AND THE FRACTURES THAT UNITE US: (RE)EXAMINING THE PAN-ETHNIC MARKER

Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo 124

DEFENDING PACHAMAMA: THE RIGHTS OF NATURE IN ECUADOR

Ernesto Sagás 143

WHO’S LAUGHING NOW?: CULTURAL HUMOR IN MEXICAN AMERICAN THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Roxanne Schroeder-Arce 162

ABOUT THE AUTHORS 176

HOTEL MARIACHI

Elena Avilés

The book, *Hotel Mariachi: Urban Space and Cultural Heritage in Los Angeles*, narrates the history of mariachi music and Catherine L. Kurland's deep family ties to the development of an urban space that has defined this distinct cultural tradition and practice. Kurland works alongside a team of community organizers, activists and academics, who collectively assisted her in lobbying for the preservation of the Spanish-Mexican roots defining Los Angeles' architecture. Nicknamed Mariachi Hotel, the Boyle Hotel received historic landmark protection in 2007 and is now a center dedicated to the preservation and promotion of mariachi music.

This book archives the present-day forms of grassroots activism and the ground shifting outcomes of actively needing to cross diverse border lines—gender, economic, political, national, cultural, racial and historic—to guard the *mestizo* inheritance of Los Angeles. A testament to the cultural pride and sense of community rooted in the Chicano Movement's sense of place and homeland, this work brings together the power of members of a community working alongside activists and scholars to preserve the cultural memories and present-day realities of the spaces we define as home.

Evangeline Ordaz-Molina, one of the founding members of the East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC), elaborates on the personal and political significance of the Mariachi Hotel in her own life. As a lawyer and creative writer, Ordaz-Molina references her childhood memories of Hotel Mariachi to illustrate how the hotel was a tower of community strength: a space inclusive of cultural difference, a welcoming space for immigrants and those vested in conserving the music of their homelands. In the Introduction, Ordaz-Molina “pays homage to the Mexican roots of the Mariachi Hotel” and recounts the arduous

project the ELACC undertook to purchase the building.¹ Through her professional and home-rooted activism, she ensured the longevity of mariachi traditions in transnational context by converting the hotel not only into a “facility that would support the economic viability of life as a mariachi musician” but, also, one that transformed space into site for the professionalization of an art in the twenty-first century.²

In “Pobladores to Mariachis: A Personal Journey,” Kurland chronicles the ways restoring the Mariachi Hotel allowed her to revive a Mexican heritage that had been lost in her own family history. In telling her story, Kurland recovers the Mexican past of her family lines rooted in the history of the establishment of Los Angeles itself. A tale about the connections between distant relations, Kurland transforms the memories of cultural and economic loss, when her family lost ownership of the Mariachi Hotel, into an act of empowerment and cultural reclamation when in 2003 she took an interest to ensure the preservation of the hotel from destruction or future peril—in particular, the strength of women vested in the unique cultural flavors inscribed in the imaginaries of family tales and imbedded in sensibilities of choice that women show in maintaining cultural continuity. The work of Kurland and Ordaz-Molina shows a true labor of feminist and feminine collaboration that reveals the revolutionary ways women, too, cross borders in acts of cultural love and pride.

The ethno-poetics Enrique Lamadrid offers in “A Paeon to Santa Cecilia, Her Fiesta, and Her Mariachis” are a tale about crossing borders at every level. Only a true folklorist gifted in music has the ability to appreciate and respond emotionally, intellectually and aesthetically to the history of the Mariachi Hotel. A professor of Spanish at the University of New Mexico, Lamadrid also succeeds in putting distant relations into perspective. From the religious angle, structuring the life and tale of Santa Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians—she heard heavenly music in her heart when she was about to marry—Lamadrid treks the globe

1. Gandert, Kurland, and Lamadrid, *Hotel Mariachi: Urban Space and Cultural Heritage in Los Angeles*, ix.

2. *Ibid.*, ix.

to show the African, Spanish, Mexican and mixed roots of mariachi music. He pays homage to the state of Jalisco, Mexico—the capital of mariachi music—by giving an ethnographic account of the history of La Plaza de Mariachi that sits adjacent to the hotel. In his role as chronicler, ethnographer and historian, Lamadrid also brings visibility to women's voices and the increasing reality of women mariachis, which reinforces the discovery of strong and creative women practicing the arts reflected in Kurland's own matriarchal genealogy.

An additional visual narrative framed in the black-and-white pictorial works augments the book's two essays. University of New Mexico professor Miguel Gandert was hired by Kurland to create a visual archive of the contemporary life of the hotel and the significance of this space to the economic, social and cultural heritage of the community. His exploration of the history and social impact of mariachi culture on a whole community's sense of itself shows how it is not just another corner in Los Angeles. A photo documentary, the photographs help bring attention to Chicano, Latino and Hispanic Los Angeles; the complicated and intertwined history of California, and the power of historical buildings to stabilize communities and shelter a sense of collectivity and community, which also foster social networks. From the everyday to the sacred, Gandert's photography offers snapshots of unique, personal and intimate behavioral patterns linked to the world of mariachi and to Santa Cecilia. His photographic series contextualizes the advent of new U.S. Hispanic and Chicano identity practices in affirmation of self and in connection to the world. His work brings a new kind of visibility to the present that complements the rewriting of subaltern communities offered in the essays.

For those interested in the dissemination of research on Chicana/o-Latina/o cultural, political and social issues in transnational and hybrid contexts, *Hotel Mariachi* explores the history of place, space and culture in the heritage of one of the most iconic historical landmarks in Los Angeles. From Kurland and Ordaz-Molina to Gandert and Lamadrid, this collection of voices centers on highlighting the present-day importance of Hotel Mariachi as a mecca of mariachi traditions. Like a dance that pairs the past with the present and merges the old with the

new, the book tells the history of Hotel Mariachi at its conception as The Cummings Hotel and in its later existence as the Boyle Hotel. By tracing the evolution of the hotel's secrets of the past, this narrative explores the links between place, space and time, which connect the many phases of Los Angeles' urban realities to that of the cultural heritages.

A book that succeeds in making visible the multiple layers of hybridity and *mestizaje* one finds when one crosses the Los Angeles River and enters the Boyle Heights-East Los Angeles area, the work is a transcendent and breathtaking experience of love for culture that residents of this community experience in the soul of their heart, soul and mind. This book is recommended for interdisciplinary fields such as Anthropology, Education, Geography, History, Literary and Cultural Studies, Political Science, Social Work and Sociology. A testament to the beauty of Hotel Mariachi as spacio-temporal *nepantla*, this book is also suited for creative writers and artists who will find among texts and images an energy equal to hearing music in one's heart.

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La Lucha Sigue: The Legacy and Lessons of Gloria Anzaldúa for Latinas in Academia

Melissa Castillo-Garsow

Abstract:

For many, Gloria Anzaldúa has become “the representative” of “the border,” Latino theory and Chicano literature. Though Anzaldúa was an incredibly important figure, her position actually represents a marginalization of Latina studies that she would critique. Combining Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga’s “Theory of the Flesh” with Chela Sandoval’s “methodology of emancipation,” new answers and strategies to the marginalization of Chicana theory and literature in academia can be developed, strategies that both take full advantage of the legacy left by a thinker of such wide reach as well as personal experience in academia. In particular, a careful return to Gloria Anzaldúa’s work as well as its reception demonstrate important possibilities in terms of an un-unified *mestiza* subject in the second decade of the twenty-first century that advances the private, the spiritual and the flesh as a way to address larger public concerns about Latinas and Latina/o Studies.

As I complete this article, I find myself at the first inaugural conference of the newly formed Latina/o Studies Association held in Chicago, July 16-19, 2014. For many senior scholars attending the conference, it has been a long journey, thirty or more years in the making. For us younger scholars, it is a time to listen and learn these histories of our field but also wonder about our own place in it. In these conversations, I hear the resonances of what Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga described in 1981 as the “theory of the flesh.”¹ According to the two, this theory is the fusion of “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on and our

1. Anzaldúa and Moraga (eds.), *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 23.

sexual longings,” which are both necessary and political.² I wonder how much has changed, if I can theorize this way in 2014.

Latina/o Studies is in a precarious position right now. Despite more than forty years of history, it is often overlooked, bounced from department to department and housed in anything from Latin American Studies to American Studies to programs like Ethnicity Race and Migration, where I find myself as a doctoral student at Yale. Partially institutionalized, partially homeless, women scholars of Latino/a Studies are particularly at risk when it comes to reaching full-time faculty positions and opportunities for tenure and advancement.³ Added to recent assaults on humanities, including the defunding and collapsing of cultural studies departments and increasing use of adjunct faculty and online classrooms, for a Latina to find a place in academia today is still very difficult.

Chela Sandoval, in interpreting the “theory of the flesh,” argued that it was not just a mode of survival but a mode “that allows practitioners to live with faith, hope and moral vision in spite of all else.”⁴ The theory of the flesh then presents not just a glimpse at Latina/o Studies in the past, but possibly also a present and future. This alternative notion of time—circling back to move forward—is one that is often dismissed and forgotten today. As Clare Hemmings argues in “Telling Feminist Stories,” how history is told works in discriminatory ways, particularly in the case of women of color.⁵ Third World feminists are referred to in the past tense, temporally fixed in the 1980s. As such, to envision something new for the future, this paper unhinges that past temporality of the theory of the flesh and brings it into the present. Thus, by revisiting Gloria Anzaldúa’s groundbreaking works, *Borderlands/La Frontera: La Nueva Mestiza; This Bridge Called my Back: Writings of Radical Women of*

2. Ibid.

3. Gutiérrez y Muhs, Yolanda, Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González and Angela P. Harris (eds.), *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*, 449.

4. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 7.

5. Hemmings, “Telling Feminist Stories,” *Feminist Theory*.

Color; and *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, and using Chela Sandoval's "methodology of emancipation," new answers and strategies to the marginalization of Chicana theory in academia can be created, strategies that both take full advantage of the legacy left by a thinker of such wide reach as well as personal experience in academia. In particular, a careful return to Gloria Anzaldúa's work as well as its reception demonstrate important possibilities in terms of an un-unified *mestiza* subject in the second decade of the twenty-first century that advances the private, the spiritual and the flesh as a way to address larger public concerns about Latinas and Latina/o Studies.

Although this was not always the case, Gloria Anzaldúa, is a United States woman of color who has found a place in the academy within the English literary canon (as well as some cultural studies and postcolonial studies). As Debra Castillo describes in her article, "Chicana Feminist Criticism," "until astonishingly recently, Anglophone Chicana literature has been institutionally homeless, perceived as marginal, or second rate, thus not respected within English Department circles,"⁶ yet critics have also "made Anzaldúa 'the representative' of 'the border.'"⁷ While Anzaldúa is a wonderful representative of Chicana literature and scholarship and despite the inclusion of her work in many university syllabi and editions, such as *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* and *The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism*, I think she would agree that there are still many issues with the exclusion of our literature and theorizing in academia. As Cynthia Franklin points out in her article "Recollecting *This Bridge* in an Anti-Affirmative Action Era," published in *This Bridge We Call Home*, even the inclusion of "*Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink*" in the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* instead of one of Anzaldúa's more aggressive pieces, which challenges what constitutes literature and theory, is problematic.⁸

6. Castillo, "Chicana Feminist Criticism," in *Latino and Latina Writers*, 1.

7. Baca, Damian, *Mestiz@ scripts, digital migrations and the territories of writing*, 21.

8. Franklin, "Recollecting This Bridge in an Anti-Affirmative Action Era," in *This Bridge We Call Home*, 418.

Laura Harris adds:

Across the board, where efforts are made to diversify departments, curricula, and other academic structures, it is not the systemic foundation of the particular department, curriculum, or academic structure that itself is altered. Instead, existing conditions are augmented by adding token diversity...tokenism functions only to validate large-scale exclusion by providing a misleading veneer of diversity and transformation.⁹

This type of tokenism can even be seen in supposedly broad-minded organizations like the American Studies Association, which is actually only nominally receptive to Latina/o Studies. For example, while in 2004, Shelley Fisher Fishkin dedicated her American Studies Association presidential address to Anzaldúa¹⁰, a writer she sees as among the most important writers of the twentieth century, is in fact a misappropriation by dominant-culture progressive academic causes that misreads Anzaldúa's notion of the border.¹¹ The issue is not that Anzaldúa is honored over other Latina thinkers, but that in an effort to make an argument about transnationalism and American Studies, Fishkin stretches Anzaldúa's theorization instead of looking toward other more applicable and also important Latina/o scholars.

Anzaldúa felt likewise in her lifetime. She wrote:

I got tired of hearing students say that *Bridge* was required in two or three of their women's studies courses; tired of being a resource for teachers and students who asked me what texts by women of color they should read or teach and where they could get these writings. I had grown frustrated that the same few women-of-color were asked to read or lecture in universities and classrooms,

9. Anzaldúa, Gloria and AnaLouise Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 376

10. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher, "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies."

11. Castillo, Debra, "Anzaldúa and Transnational American Studies," *PMLA*, 263.

or to submit work to anthologies and quarterlies. Why weren't other women-of-color being asked?¹²

Twenty-seven years after *Borderlands/La Frontera* and twenty-four years after this statement, little has changed. At Arizona State University, Fordham University and even, currently, Yale University, I found that I was unable to move forward in my study of Latino Literature at the graduate level within the English Departments because any classes that included a Latino author were writers I had already read and discussed in another class, often more than once. Instead, my only option was independent study, which was credited by my current institution but necessarily done in isolation and without a feeling of integration or conversations with my colleagues in other areas—the entire reason for joining an interdisciplinary department such as American Studies.

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval proposes a method for theorizing for U.S. people of color who have long acted, spoken and intellectualized “from the halls of academy where it has been intercepted and domesticated.”¹³ This “methodology of emancipation” functions “to develop the kinds of oppositional powers that are *analogous*, but at the same time *homeopathically resistant*, to postmodern transnationalization, along with people who are skilled enough to wield those powers,” she writes. Sandoval summons a “new kind of repoliticized citizen-warrior”¹⁴ in the tradition of Anzaldúa who, “like U.S. third world feminists, practitioners of this methodology act as interventionists, negotiators, assimilationists, radical transformers, separatists, and so on.”¹⁵ For Sandoval, this means breaking down the “theoretical apartheid” between U.S. Third World feminists and poststructuralists by placing them on equal footing. Through this comparison of divergent theoretical traditions, Sandoval develops her “methodology of emancipation” as fourfold:

12. Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color*, xvi.

13. Sandoval, 11

14. *Ibid.*, 181.

15. *Ibid.*, 26.

- (1) To develop sign-reading skills, reading power everywhere and always.
- (2) To engage interventionary tactics that are designed to shift the powers that operate inside any sign system: The choices on the level of the sign are (a) to deconstruct, and (b) to meta-ideologize.
- (3) To willingly inhabit an eccentric consciousness that permits its practitioner to carry out any of these techniques by moving within, between, or through meaning *differentially*.
- (4) To enact any of these principles with the purpose of equalizing power among interlocutors. This *democratizing aim* directs all other techniques toward the goal of egalitarian redistributions of sexed, gendered, raced, physiological, social, cultural, and/or economic powers.¹⁶

By searching out and analyzing each of these steps within Anzaldúa's work, I think new strategies can be developed, strategies that may help expand the place of Latinas/os in the standard English canon, both within the areas of literature and theory.

In terms of the first method, Anzaldúa, in her lifetime, developed a number of sign-reading skills that made her a powerful force in the academic world. Although she used familiar, dominant culture forms of theorizing and she peppered her language with key words and phrases in her own Tex-Mex Spanish to be less academic in her style, Anzaldúa was an academic in profession and in mind. She was the first from her family to go to college, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree from Pan American University in 1969 in English, Art and Education. She went on to earn a Master of Arts degree in Literature and Education from the University of Texas at Austin in 1973 and, up until her 2004 death, was pursuing a Ph.D. in Literature from the University of California—Santa Cruz. Anzaldúa taught creative writing, Chicana/o Studies and Feminist Studies at a number of institutions and received many honors, such as the National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Award, American Book

16. Ibid, 27.

Award and Sappho Award of Distinction.¹⁷ Yet her academic inclinations go back much earlier: “From the time when I was in elementary school I was this little kid that was carrying around Nietzsche, Kierkegaard,—so I had that kind of identity...now it’s a very important part of my making a living because it’s the academic community that hires me,” she comments.¹⁸

Anzaldúa was also motivated to join the academic setting “to show up the arrogant racist teachers who thought all Chicano children were dumb and dirty.”¹⁹ She learned to read “academese” and maneuver in the white world to empower herself. In an interview with Andrea Lunsford, she relates how she was marked down both at the undergraduate and graduate levels by almost all of her professors for “code-switching” and not writing the “status quo way.”²⁰ Yet despite these difficulties, she learned the “foreign tongue—standard American English” and thrived. She also sees the importance and power of having done so:

Some feminist theorists-of-color write jargonistically and abstractly, in a hard-to-access language that blocks communication, makes the general listener/reader feel bewildered and stupid. Their theories often mistakenly divide theory and lived experience and are more off putting than many of the masters they ape...I too am seduced by academic language, its theoretical babble insinuates itself into my speech and is hard to weed out. At the same time I feel that there is a place for us to use specialized language addressed to a select, professional, vocational or scholarly group—doctors, carpenters and seamsters use language that only those in their particular work can understand. We should not give up these

17. Reuman, Ann E., “Coming Into Play: an Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa,” *MELUS*, 1.

18. *Ibid.*, 29.

19. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 166.

20. Lunsford, Andrea A. and Lahoucine Ouzgane (eds.), *Crossing Borderlands: Composition and Postcolonial Studies*, 19.

‘languages’ just because they are not accessible to the general public.²¹

By adding “academese” into her arsenal of voices (the voice of the dyke, the Chicana, the professor, first person, second person, third, vernacular, formal, six varieties of Spanish, English, etc.) to speak and write in, Anzaldúa is able to create an impact in various ways. These are the “sign-reading skills” referenced by Sandoval in her first point. By understanding multiple languages, Anzaldúa not only broadens her audience but, also, challenges how both people of color and the white academic world view dominant forms of theorizing.

At the same time, this method to her theorizing is exactly what Sandoval terms “interventionary tactics” and why her theories have been so influential. Many non-Chicana feminists have studied, analyzed and expanded on Anzaldúa’s metaphor of the border as a clash between two cultures. For example, in “Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*,” Aigner-Varoz views the borderland metaphor in a more universal context: “Because many of the metaphors and archetypes she cites are cross-cultural and inter-referential, Anzaldúa’s text necessarily embraces and validates experiences of people from varied cultures, races, classes, and sexual orientations.”²² Her legacy, though, often too easily co-opted and message simplified is both her gift and our burden. While Anzaldúa takes no offense from her ideas being used by others (in an interview with Ann E. Reuman, she stated that “it validates me as a writer that people can take my images or ideas and work them out in their own way and write their own theories and their own books,”²³ it has meant that works like *Borderlands/La Frontera* lose their context (Texas borderlands), moment (1980s and creation of Chicano Studies programs), form (its heavily poetic emphasis) and purpose. In the same interview, she comments that “the people that I most want to affect is my home ethnic

21. Anzaldúa, *Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, 29

22. Aigner-Varoz, Erika, “Metaphors of a Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands /La Frontera*,” *MELUS*, 47.

23. Reuman, 4.

community, my family.”²⁴ Nevertheless, through this understanding of the academic world, Anzaldúa is able to code-switch both linguistically and in her use of different registrars in rhetorically effective ways.

Anzaldúa’s use of both “*mestiza* rhetoric” and revisionist history are just two ways she engages in what Sandoval terms “interventionary tactics that are designed to shift the powers that operate inside any sign system.”²⁵ Clearly, language is a key component of this rhetorical strategy to define, describe and empower her Chicana identity. In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” she writes, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.”²⁶ Anzaldúa’s most obvious and most commented upon linguistic choice is her mix of both Spanish and English in her essays, as she points out in her introduction to *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* :

The switching of ‘codes’ in this book from English to Castilian Spanish to the North Mexican dialect to Tex-Mex—to a sprinkling of Nahuatl to a mixture of all these, reflects my language, a new language—the language of the Borderlands. There at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born. Presently this infant language, this bastard language, Chicano Spanish is not approved by any society. But we Chicanos no longer feel that we need to beg entrance, that we need always to make the first overture—to translate to Anglos, Mexicans and Latinos, apology blurting out of our mouths with every step. Today we ask to be met halfway.²⁷

Yet this is not the only “code-switching” that Anzaldúa employs, and it is not the only place where she asks to be met halfway. Although

24. Ibid.

25. Sandoval, 27.

26. Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 98.

27. Ibid, 22.

Anzaldúa regularly employs slangy, informal Spanish, she does it in a way that does not diminish the academic validity of her work. She is clearly a scholar. Not only are her ideas and evidence complex, well-constructed and well-supported, but through her language she also demonstrates the scholarly nature of these essays. She may write “*chingado*” in one sentence, only to be followed by high diction, words and phrases, such as “dominant paradigms,” “pseudo-liberal,” “doppleganger” or “metamorphoses alchemically.” Most importantly, this is clearly a conscious act. Anzaldúa comments:

If I had made *Borderlands* too inaccessible to you by putting in too many Chicano terms, too many Spanish words, or if I had been more fragmented in the text than I am right now, you would have been very frustrated. So there are certain traditions in all the different genres—like autobiography, fiction, poetry, theory, criticism—certain standards that you have to follow...My whole struggle is to change the disciplines, to change the genres, to change how people look at a poem, at a theory or at children’s books. So I have to struggle between how many of these rules I can break and how I still can have readers read the book without getting frustrated...They do have to somehow like and approve what I am writing and accept it.²⁸

Thus, while she incorporates academic language to include some readers, she also chooses to include fiction and poetry to alter their experience of theory. “Instead of coming in through with the intellectual concept, you come in through the back door with the feeling, the emotion, the experience,” she said.²⁹ Although she acknowledges that fiction is harder to theorize in, it is also a genre that is accessible to her community as well. Anzaldúa’s work then is to both keep traditional academic approaches in mind without being limited by them. In this way she refuses to be dichotomized in yet another way, as an academic or as a creative

28. Ibid, 233.

29. Lunsford, 50.

writer: “Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me.”³⁰ By negotiating how much of white culture, theory and academic tradition to employ and how much to resist, she opens up a path where formerly marginalized scholars can both be themselves and be relevant. As Anzaldúa points out, many of these more Western methods are incredibly valuable: “I like the English language, for example, and there is a lot of Anglo ideology that I like as well. But not all of it fits with our experiences and culture roots.”³¹ According to Baca:

By merging Western and Mesoamerican practices of writing, Anzaldúa is no longer obliged to accept the Western philosophy of grammar, of linguistic control and ‘taming the wild tongue’ and mind, as universal components of writing instruction. *Mestiza* consciousness potentially reveals a new politics of teaching that no longer privileges speaking, writing, and thinking within a single language controlled by conventions of scholarly prose.³²

Mestiza rhetoric, thus, reveals the conditions of subjugated peoples across the U.S. while highlighting the significance of cultural studies today.

Similarly, Anzaldúa’s method of revisionist history offers a powerful critique of dominant stories of assimilation, colony and the border, which are still needed now. In her most famous work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa articulated both the internal and external conflict of the Chicana, by describing a radical Chicana history on the border using a form of visual writing the author calls “autohistoria-teoria.” Her sources are a mix of history texts, Mexican popular music, poetry, anthropology, psychological studies, novels, Mexican sayings and her own personal experiences. For example, mixed in with incredibly vivid images of the border, such as:

30. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, 205

31. *Ibid.*, 235.

32. Baca, 29.

Across the border in Mexico

stark silhouette of houses gutted by waves,
cliffs crumbling into the sea

silver waves marbled with spume

gashing a hole under the border fence.³³

“In 1000 B.C., descendants of the original Cochise people migrated into what is now Mexico and Central American and became the direct ancestors of many of the Mexican people”³⁴ is another example. This is a unique approach to writing history, a new way to *contra historías*: “A moving personal narrative about her grandmother’s dispossession occupies the same discursive space as a dry recitation of historical fact, while lyrics from a *corrido* about ‘the lost land’ about a poetic rendition of an ethnocentric Anglo historian’s vision of U.S. dominion over Mexico,” writes Sonia Saldívar-Hull in the introduction to the second edition of *Borderlands*.³⁵

Similarly, the incorporation of historical figures, ranging from Mexican philosopher, José Vasconcelos, to a wide variety of pre-Columbian deities to Mexican icons, rewrites history. Baca writes, “Anzaldúa’s declaration of Mesoamerican deities and traditions enacts a transformation of rhetorical performance from a Greco-Roman Western practice to a site of Mestiz@ resistance.” This creation of a “new” knowledge and history is, again, a strategic practice. As Castillo points out, Anzaldúa’s work is not an empirical, historical or sociological study of life on the U.S.-Mexican border. It omits, for example, any concrete reference to the Mexican side of the border, despite evoking its presence metaphorically.³⁶ She doesn’t mention Tijuana or Juárez, and her primary indigenous imagery comes from the Aztecs (who inhabited south central Mexico), not from a Northern Mexico/Southwestern U.S. indigenous nation where the borderland is located.³⁷ Thus, Anzaldúa is

33. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 23.

34. *Ibid.*, 26.

35. *Ibid.*, 3.

36. Castillo, “Chicana Feminist Criticism,” 12.

37. Varese, Stephano, “Indigenous Epistemologies in the Age of Globalization,” in *Critical Latin American and Latino Studies*, 151.

not working from a Third World perspective but, in fact, working to revise both Western rhetoric and Chicano nationalism, which originally incorporated these images, creating “new” memories.

Poetry, fiction, prose, code-switching, linguistic play, non-linear history,³⁸ popular culture—through these techniques Anzaldúa disrupts Western knowledge forms, performing Sandoval’s third step of “moving within, between, or through meaning *differentially*.”³⁹ Instead, Anzaldúa invokes her own, new genre called *autohistoria* in which she presents history as a serpentine cycle rather than a linear narrative. The *historia* she tells introduces indigenous icons, traditions and rituals replaced by post-Cortesian Catholic customs. But then she reconfigures this legacy of Catholicism by offering an alternative image to Chicana affinities with the Catholic *Virgen de Guadalupe: Coatlicue*, the Aztec divine mother.⁴⁰ According to Anzaldúa:

What I was trying to do by code-switching was to inject some of my history and some of my identity into this text that White people were going to read or Black people were going to read or Native American people were going to read. I was trying to make them stop and think. Code-switching jerks readers out of their world and makes each think ‘Oh, this is my world, this is another world, this is her world where she does this, where it’s possible to say words in Spanish.’⁴¹

This switch from *cuento* to *historia*, from an academic voice to an angry outsider’s voice, is again another way in which Anzaldúa discomforts and challenges a broader non-Chicano, non-Latina/o audience.

38. For a discussion of Anzaldúa’s use of time see Michelle Bastian, Michelle, “The Contradictory Simultaneity of Being with Others: Exploring Concepts of Time and Community in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa,” *Feminist Review* 97, no. 1 (2011): 151-167

39. Sandoval, 27.

40. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2.

41. Lunsford, 59.

Thus, it is Sandoval's third step ("to willingly inhabit an eccentric consciousness that permits its practitioner to carry out any of these techniques by moving within, between, or through meaning *differentially*") that reveals one of Anzaldúa's biggest challenges to academia and one of her greatest legacies. Despite the scholarly nature of many of her essays, Anzaldúa refuses to become a prisoner to Western rationality. As collaborator AnaLouise Keating notes, "Given the academy's over-emphasis on rational thought, coupled with the mind/body oppositional dualisms pervading western cultures, this resistance to exploring the spiritual dimensions of Anzaldúa's work is not surprising."^{42,43} Nevertheless as "Anzaldúa's spiritual-activist perspective shapes her theory of transformative writing, or what I call her shaman aesthetics," it should not be ignored in any discussion of her theory. In the same way, the lack of attention to the second half of *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which is a collection of poetry, demonstrates the canon's discomfort with Anzaldúa's non-traditional forms of theorizing.

These omissions in the way Anzaldúa has been anthologized and received by a wider audience indicate an important aspect of her tokenization and how we must advocate for a full, even contradictory legacy for Anzaldúa and other important Latina/o Studies figures. For example, in her essay, "Entering Into the Serpent," and the poem, "Ella tiene su tono," she describes the supernatural power derived from serpents. This connection to her animal counterpart is a powerful image but also a meditation on Anzaldúa's personal spirituality derived from an indigenous background. She also incorporates Catholic representations, such as Guadalupe, into her symbolism, creating a unique and powerful blend that rivals Western rationality. "Like many Indians and Mexicans, I did not deem my psychic experiences real," she writes. "I accepted their reality, the 'official' reality of the rational, reasonable mode which is connected with external reality, the upper world, and is considered the

42. Keating, AnaLouise (ed.), *EntreMundos/AmongWorlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*, 242.

43. For a greater exploration of Anzaldúa spirituality, see AnnaLouise Keating, "'I'm a Citizen of the Universe': Gloria Anzaldúa's Spiritual Activism as Catalysts for Social Change," *Feminist Studies* 34, nos. 1/2 (2008): 53-69.

most developed consciousness—the consciousness of duality.⁴⁴ In this other consciousness, rationality exists, but it also incorporates dreams, imagination, soul and spirituality at the same time. While a Western brain may split these two sides, Anzaldúa develops “*la facultad*” to inhabit both at the same time. It is “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface.”⁴⁵ Here, Anzaldúa’s concern is not necessarily the creation of a standard academic argument but, instead, a more artistic, spiritual and metaphorical expression of herself and her culture. She, like the Indians, “did not split the artistic from the functional.”⁴⁶

This is what Anzaldúa describes as “The Coatlicue State.” Borrowing from the Aztecs, Anzaldúa’s Coatlicue offers a powerful and unique image. The goddess is represented as a woman whose head is two rattlesnakes facing each other. She has snakes where her hands should be but wears a necklace made of open hands and hearts (the one symbolizing giving; the other, pain). A symbol of ancestral and local knowledge, Coatlicue both represents Anzaldúa’s identification with Aztec culture and her divided self. But it is more than just an image of duality. It is also a state of mind. Anzaldúa explains, “We need Coatlicue to slow us up so that their psyche can assimilate previous experiences and process the changes. If we don’t take the time, she’ll lay us low with illness, forcing us to rest.”⁴⁷ The Coatlicue state is a kind of mental stasis that allows Anzaldúa to reflect, to fully understand the situation and awaken from the pain of the everyday. It shakes her out of a state of acceptance. From this heightened awareness, a *mestiza* identity will either fragment or disintegrate in the face of adversity or sharpen into a more resilient, conscious sense of self.

It is in this state, which Anzaldúa expands into “*nepantla*” or an in-between state, in which a unique perspective emerges. It is a threshold where the boundaries of culture, academia and genre break

44. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 59.

45. *Ibid.*, 60.

46. *Ibid.*, 88.

47. *Ibid.*, 46.

down, creating a new form of expression, thought and cultural theory. Anzaldúa describes it as follows: “Those of us who live skirting *otros mundos*, other groups, in this in-between state I call *nepantla* have a unique perspective. We notice the breaches in feminism, the rifts in Raza studies, the breaks in our disciplines, the splits in this country. These cracks show the flaws in our cultures, the faults in our pictures of reality. The perspective from the cracks gives us different ways of defining self, of defining group identity.”⁴⁸ As a self-described “Chicana *tejana* feminist-dyke-*patlache* poet, fiction writer and cultural theorist,” she is able to serve as a “*nepantlera*” or mediator between what might seem like incompatible worlds, for example spirituality and rational thought. This is why so many find Anzaldúa’s writing so powerful, even after her death or decades after *Borderlands* was written.

It is this *mestiza* consciousness that completes Sandoval’s “methodology of emancipation.” As the final integration of all of the complexities of the borderland, the *mestiza* consciousness is a “*democratizing aim* that directs all other techniques toward the goal of egalitarian redistributions of sexed, gendered, raced, physiological, social, cultural, and/or economic powers.”⁴⁹ Anzaldúa describes this democracy in *Borderlands*’ final essay, “*La conciencia de la mestiza: Toward a New Consciousness*:

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytic reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and towards a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes.⁵⁰

Anzaldúa’s work is made up of fragments, colorful pieces of a puzzle that individually may not go together but together form a distinct identity and perspective. Just as she calls for Chicanas to accept all aspects of

48. Keating, 1.

49. Sandoval, 27.

50. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 101

their heritage and identity, her writing refuses to dichotomize her presentation of self, allowing for contradictions. She is male and female, White and Black, *Mexicana* and *indígena*, a new being: “that has no names/that she has many names/that she doesn’t know her names.”⁵¹ She says as a queer, she has no culture, yet at the same time she has so much. Thus, she inhabits Sandoval’s idea of a new kind of social movement that is “differential.”

When Keating was first collecting submissions for what would become Anzaldúa’s final anthology, *This Bridge We Call Home*, she questioned the place of the work within the academy. “*Bridge* has been repeatedly praised for its oppositional stance to the academy, for its use of nontheoretical language, for its challenge to high theory. How could so many people respond to our call for papers, which so clearly links our new book with *This Bridge Called My Back*, with such theoretical pieces?” she asked.⁵² Shortly after, she realized, “You can’t make simplistic assumptions about who does and does not use theory. Maybe academic theory is not necessarily/automatically ‘white.’”⁵³ Chela Sandoval’s highly theoretical *Methodology of the Oppressed* is testament to this and to Anzaldúa’s work.

Anzaldúa’s legacy not only shows us that academic theory does not necessarily need to be white but, also, the absolute necessity of academic theory outside the standard Western rational modes of discourse. This is where we still have a lot to learn from Anzaldúa. She writes:

Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is *vital* that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we

51. Ibid, 65.

52. Anzaldúa and Keating, *This Bridge We Call Home*, 13.

53. Ibid, 14.

transform that theorizing space.⁵⁴

Yet before we can transform the theorizing space, we must familiarize ourselves with the current situation, Anzaldúa argues. We must fully understand dominant culture, but we must also give fuller readings and attention to Latina/o scholars and correct the simplified ways those like Anzaldúa have been presented and deemed worthy of being representative.

Anzaldúa's participation in both scholarly and more creative pursuits, her various ways of code-switching and her *nepantlism* are so striking because of her ability to both be of the cannon and vigorously battle against it. "But it is not enough to have our books published," Anzaldúa warns. "We must also actively engage in establishing the criteria and standards by which our work can be viewed."⁵⁵ And as Sandoval does, let us reflect those back outwards, apply those standards to non-Latinas/os as well, demonstrating our relevance and theoretical power.

Thus, on Anzaldúa's encouragement, I add my own "theory of the flesh" and fuse my personal experience in this essay. I never expected to fall in love with literature. Then I read Gloria Anzaldúa in a Latino literature class at New York University. I was shocked by her mixture of poetry and academic scholarship, her beautiful prose filled with Spanish slang and borderland images. I had never read anything that spoke to me in that way. She understood and articulated the experience of Chicanas who are not only situated between cultures but also face the oppression of their Mexican counterparts. This writing empowered, grounded and clarified a cultural identity I had been struggling with for two decades. In Gloria Anzaldúa's work, I found not only literature but also literary criticism and its ability to provoke thought, debate and even change. Anzaldúa inspired me to complete a master's degree at Fordham University in English Literature with a concentration in Creative Writing. I, too, refused to be dichotomized. Today, at Yale as a doctoral student in American Studies and African American Studies, I continue

54. Anzaldúa, *This Bridge Called My Back*, xxv.

55. *Ibid*, 163.

to work toward my goal of training English Literature students to be global thinkers—people who see American Literature not just as a group of white and African American writers but as a richly inclusive range of writers, including Latinos/as, Asian Americans and Native Americans. Growing up with two languages and in multiple cultures, I was afforded the privilege of what W.E.B. Dubois first conceptualized as “double consciousness.” This is a privilege that many Departments of English historically have not provided students. And yet, given the election and re-election of Barack Obama, greatly due to Latino voters, this is a reality we can no longer afford to neglect. It was the Zapatistas who envisioned “a world in which many worlds will co-exist.” That is also my hope for English Literature Studies and why Anzaldúa’s legacy in academia is so crucial. I wish to be a part of a continued effort to understand the multiple meanings of America in all their complexity. It would be my privilege to find bridges and greater links between the canon and newly canonized texts and at the same time, express this complexity through the topics I choose to write about, which are neither “Latino” nor “white” nor “female” but the blend with which I grew up.

This takes me back to two final thoughts from Gloria Anzaldúa, the most important mentor I have had and whom I never had the honor of meeting. Anzaldúa was a coalition builder. And this is what is sorely needed in the isolationist bowels of writing. In the conversations leading up to the Latina/o Studies Association conference I am now attending, story after story came from professors at institutions across the country yearning to be a part of a greater community, exhausted from having to represent Latinas/os in all their diversity. Works like *Telling to Live: Latino Feminist Testimonios* are important ways of building coalitions, but Anzaldúa would urge for more:

If we do not create these institutions, we certainly perpetuate them through our inadvertent support... I see Third World peoples and women not as oppressors but as accomplices to oppression by our unwittingly passing on to our children and our friends the oppressor’s ideologies. I cannot discount the role I play as accomplice, that we all play as accomplices, for we are not screaming loud

enough in protest.⁵⁶

These words written almost thirty years ago are still true, and I urge you to scream with me louder in protest, more so in the face of faculty reductions and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). There is the time when we need greater Latina/o visibility in actively questioning administrative choices, in increasing avenues for our research. But we cannot be stuck in our own little worlds and institutions. We must work regionally, nationally and internationally so that one day, the importance of Latina/o Literature or Latina/o Studies is no longer a question but one that resonates widely. This conference is a wonderful first step but shockingly overdue.

Likewise, there needs to be more emphasis on collaboration, community and coalition building for young scholars, especially students for whom the experience of graduate school can be one of the loneliest and most disheartening times. We need greater examples of mentoring and collaboration. As Anzaldúa would remind us, as *las nepantleras*, we must continue to:

...envision a time when the bridge will no longer be needed—we'll have shifted to a seamless *nosotras*. This move requires a different way of thinking and relating to others; it requires that we act on our interconnectivity, a mode of connecting similar to hypertexts' multiple links—it includes diverse others and does not depend on traditional categories or sameness.⁵⁷

Thus, we must question and battle the limited (though talented) representatives, such as Gloria Anzaldúa or Junot Díaz and, instead, offer up our diversity and often disunity as a strength. We must question why certain Latina/o theories and stories are accepted not because those are not valid but because they occult others. Until we value Anzaldúa's struggle to be both of and outside the academy and take it as our own, her vision of a world without bridges will never exist.

56. Ibid, 207.

57. Ibid, 507.

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Identidad viajera: la mexicanidad de Rosario Sansores en su poesía transnacional

Ruskin Chádez

Abstract:

Este artículo subraya los elementos identitarios mexicanos de Rosario Sansores presentes en algunos de sus poemas y otros escritos, para sostener la idea de que dichos elementos siempre viajan con la persona independientemente del lugar donde se encuentre. A pesar de lo anterior, se subraya que la identidad no se mantiene incólume, sino que es un constructo social que se renueva y enriquece constantemente por el roce con el/lo otro, ya que el viaje (real o imaginario) propicia las identidades transnacionales. Además, se advierte cómo la obra sansorina publicada en EE.UU., contribuyó a apaciguar la siempre constante nostalgia de los migrantes y exiliados mexicanos en EE.UU, quienes sí tenían acceso a los periódicos, pero muchos no podían regresar a su patria, es decir, en cierta medida la obra de Rosario Sansores satisfizo la ideología del “México de afuera”, con sus pinceladas en relación con el elogio a su patria.



Fig. 1: Rosario Sansores, *circa* 1937. Colección particular, plata sobre gelatina. Fotógrafo Dresler. Foto facilitada por la nieta de Rosario Sansores, Sra. Beatriz Núñez Sanjenís.

Rosario Sansores (1889-1972) fue una poeta y periodista nacida en Mérida, Yucatán, el 25 de agosto de 1889. Se casó en 1904 y emigró a Nueva York, donde residió aproximadamente por un año (1908). De su matrimonio nacieron tres hijos: Blanca, Beatriz, y un varón, quien murió cuando era un bebé. Después se estableció por veintitrés años en la Ciudad de La Habana (1909-1932) y el resto de su vida la pasó en la Ciudad de México. En este sentido, me interesa subrayar los elementos identitarios mexicanos de Rosario Sansores presentes en algunos de sus poemas y otros escritos, para sostener la idea de que dichos elementos

siempre viajan con la persona independientemente del lugar donde se encuentre. A pesar de lo anterior, también me detendré en el punto de que la identidad no se mantiene aislada o incólume, sino que es un constructo social que se renueva y enriquece constantemente por el roce o convivencia con el/lo otro, ya que el viaje (real o imaginario) es un catalizador para la creación de identidades transnacionales o caleidoscópicas.

Entiendo la identidad transnacional como lo sostiene la académica e investigadora Christina Sisk, quien *grosso modo*, habla de la postura que se adopta al vivir entre un país receptor y el país o región de origen, postura que se moldea desde el punto de vista político, económico, religioso, cultural, etc. Incluso propone que los que se quedan en el país o región de origen también pueden tener identidades transnacionales al estar en contacto con sus familiares migrantes.

Rosario Sansores y sus viajes físicos y artísticos

En estos países Rosario Sansores publicó sus textos literarios y periodísticos, como poemas, cuentos breves, narraciones, artículos, crónicas, reflexiones, etc. Algunas de las publicaciones periódicas habaneras donde Sansores colaboró fueron los periódicos *el Diario de la Marina*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, las revistas *Carteles*, *Bohemia*, *El Fígaro*, etc. Durante esta época ganó el concurso del madrigal en la ciudad de Querétaro, México (1924), con el madrigal intitulado “La estrella” (D’Acosta 65).

Sansores regresó a la Ciudad de México en 1932, donde también cultivó la poesía, pero sobre todo fue conocida por su labor periodística. Colaboró en los periódicos *Excélsior*, *Novedades*, *El Diario de la Tarde*, en periódicos de provincia y en las revistas *Hoy*, *La Familia*, *Revista Social y Diplomática*, *Amenidades*, etc. En Yucatán publicó en *El Eco del Comercio*, *La Revista de Mérida* y *La Revista de Yucatán*, entre otros.

Hay registros de colaboraciones sansorinas en varios periódicos americanos en español¹, sobresale el caso de *La Prensa* de San Antonio, donde publicó desde 1914. Además destacan *Epoca* de San Antonio,

Heraldo de México de Los Angeles, *Hispano América* de San Francisco, *Tucsonense* de Tucson, *Cronista del Valle* de Brownsville, *Traducción-Prensa* de Tampa, *La Prensa* de Nueva York, *La Prensa* de Los Angeles y *Mundo* de Oakland, entre otros más.

La embajada de la República de Cuba en México, el 4 de julio de 1955, envió a Rosario Sansores la más alta condecoración de Cuba, la Orden Nacional del Mérito Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. También le otorgaron a Sansores La Orden Mambí de Cuba. La escritora y periodista, Helia D'Acosta, subraya que por los cincuenta años de periodismo (1969) le dieron a Sansores la medalla Filomeno Mata (62). Por su parte, el ingeniero e investigador musical, Roberto Mac-Swiney Salgado, señala que Rosario Sansores viajó a Ecuador en 1967, cuando “el Ayuntamiento de Guayaquil le otorgó unas palmas Literarias y la declaró ‘Poetisa de América’ y también fue agasajada en Quito por el Presidente de la República y por el Embajador de México en Ecuador” (12).

Existen alrededor de veinticinco obras de Rosario Sansores. En prosa son ocho, contando la edición de *Rutas de Emoción* del Club Rotario, y de poesía son diecisiete. Rosario Sansores falleció el 7 de enero de 1972 a los 82 años de edad. Fue sepultada en la cripta familiar del Panteón Jardín de la Ciudad de México. Falleció a consecuencia de un infarto al miocardio.

Los libros que se conocen físicamente en prosa son: *Rutas de emoción*. México: Libros y Revistas, 1945; *Diez años de juventud*. México: Libros y Revistas, 1946; *Libro azul de la sociedad mexicana*. México: Publicidad Carbac, 1946; *Dulzura en el recuerdo*. México: Libros y Revistas, 1951. Los de poesía son: *Ensueños y Quimeras*. La Habana, 1911; *Del país del ensueño*. La Habana, 1911; *Las horas pasan*. La Habana, 1921; *Mientras se va la vida*. México: Herrero Hermanos Sucesores, 1925; *Cantaba el mar azul*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1927; *El breviario de Eros*. La Habana: Molina y Ca., 1930; *La novia del sol*. México: Ediciones Botas, 1933; *Fruta madura*. México: Artes Gráficas del Edo, 1940; *Mi corazón y yo*. México: Libros y revistas, 1943; *Los cien mejores poemas*. México: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1946; *Sombra en el agua*: México: Editorial Olimpo, 1951 y *Polvo de olvido*.

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Rosario Sansores y su contexto

Este nacionalismo identitario transnacional de Rosario Sansores no sólo estaba condicionado o afloraba debido a la melancolía de la distancia o al agradecimiento que sentía por su país natal o por una patria que la acogió, ni tampoco solamente por sus creencias y valores personales, también estaba influido, como ya se ha advertido, por el roce con lo otro, es decir, por el contexto en que le tocó vivir y crear. Es importante puntualizar que cuando Rosario Sansores llegó a Cuba en 1909, la República acababa de fundarse (1902), después de varios siglos de colonialismo español; existía un ambiente de relativa libertad de expresión, principalmente en el ámbito periodístico. Entre los periódicos más sólidos de la época se encontraba el *Diario de la Marina*, donde Sansores fue colaboradora. Las publicaciones periódicas trataban temas de corte político en su mayoría, debido al reciente nacimiento de la República.

En Cuba, la asimilación de las nuevas tendencias literarias, como el Modernismo, se vio truncada por el advenimiento de la Guerra de Independencia de 1895 y la posterior Guerra Hispano-Cubana-Estadounidense. La producción literaria, *grosso modo*, se tornó comprometida con los acontecimientos, patriótica y revolucionaria, donde lo nacional era lo que interesaba. En este sentido, el escritor y crítico literario José Antonio Portuondo, asevera que un acento desilusionado y amargo caracterizó la obra de la primera generación literaria de la República, y que “en la hora amarga de la frustración política vuelven el verso romántico y el tono herediano de exaltación patriótica a imponerse en la mayor parte de los poetas del period” (47).

La producción literaria republicana de la cual se nutrió Rosario Sansores pertenece, básicamente, a la llamada primera generación, que abarca los años iniciales de la República, hasta un poco antes de 1930. En relación con esta generación literaria, el escritor y crítico literario Raimundo Lazo comenta que:

La primera, dominada por el entusiasmo de la victoria contra la España colonial y el triunfo de la República, tiende al lirismo verbal y la oratoria [...] A la primera generación, la de los discípulos y continuadores de Julián del Casal y la de sus afines corresponde la liquidación del modernismo, en Cuba, de manifestaciones muy irregulares debido a las circunstancias políticas del país. (184-185)

Por otro lado, a su regreso a la Ciudad de México, también le tocó vivir y crear bajo el influjo de la literatura de la Revolución; tendencia que se enmarca de 1910-1940 aproximadamente en México. Los principales géneros literarios promotores de este movimiento fueron el cuento y la novela. Aunque la poesía y el drama también se nutrieron del mismo. El escritor y crítico literario Luis Leal sostiene que esta nueva ideología “rechaza el positivismo de los ‘científicos’, las influencias extranjeras y la estética de los modernistas” (63), es decir, no evita los temas relacionados con la realidad mexicana del momento y le da protagonismo y voz a “los de abajo”. Algunos de los representantes de esta tendencia fueron: Mariano Azuela, Martín Luis Guzmán, Xavier Icaza y Nellie Campobello, entre muchos más.

Una de las variantes de la novela de la Revolución, según Leal, fue la novela cristera, cuyos máximos exponentes fueron José Guadalupe de Anda y Jesús Goytortúa. Otra variante que aparece en la época es la novela indigenista, en la cual, según Leal, “el indio ya no es un motivo exótico sino un ser social cuyos problemas vitales han sido ignorados por el grupo dominante” (76). Algunos de los representantes de esta corriente fueron: Antonio Mediz Bolio, Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Andrés Henestrosa, Eduardo Luquín, Juan de Dios Bojórquez, Gregorio López y Fuentes y Rosario Castellanos, entre otros más.

El periódico *El Nacional* fue uno de los medios que estimuló la creación de cuentos de la Revolución. Se dice que la época dorada del cuento de esta temática va de 1928-1940, cuando sobresalieron escritores como Francisco L. Urquiza, Rafael F. Muñoz, Gerardo Murillo, Francisco Rojas González, Jesús Millán y Nellie Campobello, entre otros. Rivas

sostiene que el cuento mexicano de esta época, “realista-costumbrista, siguió los senderos del nacionalismo que la novela tomara, inspirándose muchas veces en los sucesos recientes de la Revolución de 1910” (343).

A partir de 1940, con el término de la presidencia de Lázaro Cárdenas, se cierra una etapa para la vida política y literaria en México, es decir, termina la revolución social y comienza una unificación en la literatura mexicana. Según Leal, surge una literatura mexicana y a la vez universal producto de la fusión de la estética de los Contemporáneos y la de los escritores de la Revolución. El filósofo Samuel Ramos influyó en los nuevos escritores de esta época para analizar profundamente el carácter mexicano, lo cual se permea a todos los géneros literarios como son la poesía, la narrativa, el teatro y el ensayo.

No quisiera pasar por alto que en el libro, *Fruta Madura* (1945), Rosario Sansores incluye una sección titulada “El México de ayer”, donde aparecen unos poemas a modo de crónicas de varios lugares históricos de México: habla de “El zócalo”, de “Chapultepec”, etc. Además tiene una sección de “Los sonetos de la Revolución”, donde incluye versos patrióticos, como en el poema a “Madero”, a “Juan soldado”, donde se habla sobre los héroes anónimos que no han tenido reconocimiento, pero que jugaron un papel importante en la gesta.

Poesía de Rosario Sansores

La poesía de Rosario Sansores es conocida principalmente por su acento romántico y modernista. En este sentido, el escritor Octavio Paz, según el periodista y poeta Roger Cicero Mac-Kinney, sostiene que Rosario Sansores fue “la mujer romántica que sentía en la piel el llamado estricto del amor, y la considera nuestra más audaz poeta romántica”². Sin embargo, no en todos los poemas sansorinos se aprecia un amor platónico, idílico, o para ser más preciso, un amor imposible, en algunos casos efímero, pero intenso. Sino que también afloran algunos poemas y artículos imbuidos de su mexicanidad.

Antes de seguir con el análisis quisiera recordar que si bien en *Crítica y Verdad* y en *La Muerte del Autor*, Roland Barthes sostiene que en la

escritura se desvanece cualquier marca autoral, o lo que es lo mismo, el autor-persona agoniza hasta perecer, hay otros autores como Bajtín y Foucault que sostienen lo contrario. Bajtín en *Estética de la creación verbal*, asevera que “todo enunciado, oral o escrito, primario o secundario, en cualquier esfera de la comunicación discursiva, es individual y por lo tanto puede reflejar la individualidad del hablante (o del escritor)” (120). En relación con lo anterior, Foucault advierte que en los textos siempre afloran algunos detalles que remiten al escritor y a la realidad exterior, como se aprecia en *El orden del discurso* (1970), donde este autor advierte que desde el siglo XVII la función de autor no ha cesado de reforzarse. Hago digresión porque en este ensayo voy a hablar a veces del yo lírico en los poemas de Rosario Sansores, pero en otras ocasiones me referiré directamente a la autora real, no para a hacer biografismo, sino porque prefiero posturas intermedias a posturas más radicales o extremas.

Mucho se ha dicho sobre si Rosario Sansores era cubana y no mexicana, es decir, ha habido una polémica al respecto. En parte varios periódicos hispanos en EE.UU. jugaron un rol decisivo en este sentido al estimular esta falsa creencia. Por ejemplo, tanto en *La Prensa* de San Antonio como en *La Prensa* de Nueva York, en el año 1927, Rosario Sansores fue presentada como poetisa cubana. Sin embargo, lo cierto es que era mexicana, yucateca, para ser más precisos.

Sansores se despide en una ocasión que visita a México, con el poema “Adiós a México”, según la investigadora María Eugenia Mesa Olazábal, de la siguiente manera:

Lejos me lleva la suerte mía
del bello suelo donde nací,
donde mil dichas gocé tranquila
y realizados mis sueños vi...

En esta estrofa se muestra el sentimiento de pertenencia a México que siente el yo lírico, ya que es una tierra que le ha brindado alegrías y gozo. Además, está presente la melancolía de la despedida de su tierra natal, ingrediente omnipresente en los exiliados y migrantes.



Fig. 2: Rosario Sansores (1935). Colección particular, plata sobre gelatina. Foto facilitada por la nieta de Rosario Sansores, Sra. Beatriz Núñez Sanjenís.

Por otro lado, en La Habana escribe el poema “México”, donde el yo lírico describe una serie de rasgos arquetípicos de este país como las pencas de los magueyes verdes, las inditas con sus huacales de barro, los ahuehuetes milenarios, los charros, etc. Esto habla de que a pesar de que Rosario Sansores ha migrado y está en contacto con la cultura cubana, tiene muy presente sus raíces. Pero lo interesante es cómo termina el mismo poema: “¡Alma extraña de Cuauhtémoc! / pasarán siglos y siglos, / pero tu torvo silencio, / hoy como ayer es el mismo...(168).”³

De aquí me interesa rescatar la idea del silencio torvo o colérico proveniente de los mexicas, porque el yo lírico retoma el mismo tópico en el poema “Novia del sol”, publicado en *El Cronista del Valle*, Brownsville (1927). En este poema, el yo lírico se identifica con las raíces mexicas cuando dice “Novia del sol y de la noche hermana, / trasunto de mi raza aventurera, / aun llevo en mis pupilas prisioneras / la luz de una visión dulce y lejana. / Guarda mi mansedumbre de cristiana, / rebeliones atávicas y oscuras / extrañas ambiciones y ternuras, / que no

percibe la intuición humana (12)⁴. En estos versos no sólo se nota la actitud guerrera del yo lírico y se retoma el tópico antes mencionado en relación con el torvo mexica, sino que también ella considera a esta raza viajera y dispuesta a la aventura, recordemos el peregrinar mexica desde el supuesto Aztlán. Asimismo, emerge de nueva cuenta la melancolía cuando subraya lo de “visión dulce y lejana”.

De la cita anterior también se puede concluir que el yo lírico da por sentado que su identidad es mestiza, entre sus ancestros aztecas y el cristiano conquistador, por lo que se inserta dentro del discurso nacional mexicano del mestizaje en un espacio americano donde predominaba entre los migrantes letrados hispanos el concepto del “México de afuera”, el cual se retomará más adelante.

En este punto, cabe la pregunta: si Rosario Sansores era yucateca, ¿por qué se hace tanto hincapié en lo mexica y no en lo maya? El poema “Atavismo”, publicado en su libro *La novia del sol*, da pistas en este sentido; el yo lírico expresa lo siguiente “Por mis calidas [*sic*] venas tal vez corre mezclada / la inquietud de una raza fuerte de aventureros / y heredé de los Mayas impasibles y austeros, / esta absurda tristeza que llevo en la mirada!” (27). Indudablemente ella relaciona lo colérico con los mexicas y la impasibilidad con los mayas, por eso es que asumió el tópico del torvo silencio con lo mexica y no con lo maya. Lo importante es que su identidad no deja a un lado las raíces mayas y esto da cuenta nuevamente de que Rosario Sansores se inscribe dentro del discurso nacional del mestizaje, propuesto por los intelectuales mexicanos a principio del siglo XX.

A pesar que Rosario Sansores está escribiendo y redefiniendo su identidad mexicana desde La Habana, esta identidad no se mantiene indiferente a la cultura cubana. En este sentido, al igual que hizo con la Ciudad de México, al despedirse de La Habana escribe el poema “Mi adiós a La Habana” y el poema “Al partir”, donde “los versos de la poeta yucateca reflejan cierta melancolía” por La Habana, como bien aclara la investigadora María Eugenia Mesa Olazábal, cuando navega rumbo a México. El poema dice:

“Adiós” le digo a la risueña Habana.
Y en tanto que yo sufro cruel quebranto,
nadie habrá que derrame amargo llanto
por la triste y ausente mejicana. [sic]

En el mismo se aprecia cómo el yo lírico sufre la partida y, por tanto, se identifica con la cultura habanera, ya que tiene que abandonar la ciudad que la ha cobijado y adoptado. Sin embargo, a pesar de que se nota un lazo de identificación con La Habana, el yo lírico no deja de ratificar su mexicanidad, como bien lo aclara el último verso de esta estrofa.

Asimismo, me gustaría indicar el aspecto lingüístico en Sansores, es decir, la identidad de Rosario Sansores se vio influida por la manera de hablar del cubano, ya que ella adoptó varios vocablos frecuentes en la isla en sus poemas, como la palabra *zaya* (más conocida como *falda* en México), *reparto* (lo que se conoce en México como *colonia*), *máquinas* (para referirse a los coches), etc. De hecho escribió un poema titulado “El búcaro roto”: *búcaro* es la palabra que los cubanos usamos para denominar al florero.

Rosario Sansores tampoco se olvida de su natal Mérida e igualmente le dedica varios poemas donde evoca recuerdos gratos. Uno de ellos es el poema “Vieja ciudad querida”, publicado en *Las horas pasan* (1942)⁵, el cual dice: “Vieja ciudad querida, ¡con qué emoción tan suave / mi corazón evoca la quietud de tu ambiente! / ¡Cómo quisiera, a veces, convertirme en un ave / y alzar a ti mi vuelo, taciturna y doliente!” (93). El yo lírico muestra una postura identitaria regional ya que, a pesar de sentirse identificada con La Habana y con México y de estar escribiendo desde La Habana, tiene muy presente su origen yucateco. Asimismo, se puede constatar que el ansia del regreso está presente en estos versos. Sansores sólo retornó una vez a Mérida, ya que su demandante trabajo no se lo permitía. Puede ser considerada entonces como una exiliada económica, como advierte el Dr. Kanellos para este tipo de situaciones.

La cita anterior está en consonancia con las ideas de la Dra. Christina Sisk, ya que ésta sostiene que: “the migration must be understood as a multiregional and transnational phenomenon that

involves the migrants' places of origin (84).” Esto, a grandes rasgos, tiene que ver con la idea de que la cultura de los lugares de origen viaja con los migrantes.

En este punto, me gustaría subrayar un dato que me parece interesante en relación con la radicalidad de la identidad yucateca sansorina, es decir, a pesar de que ella se asume dentro del discurso nacional mexicano del mestizaje, también tiene un cuento titulado “El país natal”, donde se refiere a Mérida o Yucatán como su país natal y no como el estado natal, recordemos la tendencias separatistas de México que en algún momento tuvo la península, pero Rosario Sansores no abunda mucho al respecto. Lo que sí es un hecho es que este detalle marca un atisbo de la radicalidad de su identidad yucateca. Es un fenómeno un poco parecido al de los indígenas, ya que un indígena zapoteco, para sólo citar un ejemplo, sabe que es mexicano, pero si uno le pregunta por su identidad dice que es zapoteco antes que mexicano.

No he encontrado aún evidencia de que Sansores haya publicado durante su estancia en Nueva York. Sin embargo, sus colaboraciones desde la Ciudad de La Habana y la Ciudad de México, eran constantes en varios de los periódicos hispanos en Estados Unidos: algunos ya señalados. Rosario Sansores llegó a ser una de las figuras literarias más importantes de esos años, comparada con Gabriela Mistral, Juana de Ibarbourou y Rosalía de Castro, entre otras. Además, sus columnas se alternaban con las de escritores consagrados como Martín Luis Guzmán, José Juan Tablada, Amado Nervo, etc.

Si bien Rosario Sansores no migró a EE.UU. por un periodo largo, sí estaba en contacto con la cultura y con las ideas literarias, culturales y sociales que circulaban entre EE.UU., la Ciudad de México, la Ciudad de La Habana y Yucatán, donde también colaboraba a menudo. Sisk subraya que “cultural identities may be transnational” (74). En este sentido, como ya dije, si bien Rosario Sansores no migró en esta etapa productiva a EE.UU., su producción cultural (en este caso literaria y periodística) era receptiva y emisora de las ideas que circulaban en el mundo hispano en EE.UU. y los demás países, debido a que sus colaboraciones eran constantes en varios periódicos, o lo que es lo mismo, su producción

cultural, quien sí viajaba y mucho, se convirtió en el vehículo para que su identidad estuviera en contacto con el/lo otro, no era necesario un viaje real de la autora.

Lo que se ha dicho de Rosario Sansores

En este punto, me gustaría subrayar que a pesar de que la identificación de Rosario Sansores con la cultura habanera se expresa por ella misma, a través del yo lírico de sus poemas, otras personas (el otro) también han puntualizado su cubanidad. En este sentido, el periodista y crítico Francis Laguado Jayme expresó, en *La Prensa* de San Antonio (1928) que “Vestida de primavera, va siempre por las calles de la Habana, como una bella y divina alondra, la dulce y lírica Rosario Sansores. Es mexicana. Pero se siente muy habanera, enamorada fiel del mar heráldico y canto, y del cielo azul de la grande y cosmopolita capital cubana” (14). Lo interesante es que desde un periódico en Estados Unidos, se habla de la cubanidad de una mexicana, que vive y escribe desde La Habana. Con lo cual quiero decir que si bien una persona asume su propia postura en términos de identidad, el otro también construye una identidad en torno a esta persona.

Lo anterior se aprecia con más claridad, cuando el abogado y político mexicano, Querido Moheno y Tabares, defendió públicamente a Rosario Sansores en *La Prensa* de San Antonio, ante la omisión del escritor y periodista mexicano Carlos González Peña en la *Historia de la literatura mexicana* (1928), en estos términos:

...mi ardiente y vieja sed de justicia, me da ocasión para escribir esta página en elogio de una egregia artista que González Peña olvidara en su Historia. Me refiero a la eminente poetisa mexicana Rosario Sansores [...] Una eminente mexicana que aún allá, en la dulce y maternal tierra de Cuba, nunca echara en olvido a la tierra nativa! [...] Y es triste que una mujer así, que vive poniendo su patria a tamaña altura, en fuerza de nuestro abandono se esté perdiendo para México. (15)

Labor periodística de Rosario Sansores

Además, en cuanto Rosario Sansores llega a México en 1932, visita y entrevista al escritor Federico Gamboa. Entrevista que publica en *La Prensa* de Los Angeles y que dice lo siguiente:

Me cuenta los amargos días del exilio que vivió en la Habana [...] José María Collantes, le brindó generosa ayuda poniendo a su disposición las páginas de una revista que dirigía entonces y en la cual le ofreció a Don Federico cincuenta dólares por crónica. La Habana fue muy buena para nosotros los mexicanos que arribamos a ella. Pasábamos de ocho mil y todos obtuvimos trabajo. Yo suspiro ante el recuerdo de la ciudad azul donde quedaron sepultados mis sueños más hermosos! (12)

Al mismo tiempo de dar cuenta de la situación del exilio mexicano en La Habana, Rosario Sansores se muestra agradecida con esta ciudad otra vez.

Rosario Sansores empezó a colaborar de manera regular en la revista semanal *Hoy* en 1937, en la Ciudad de México, donde el periodista y director de la revista, Regino Hernández Llergo, le dio la oportunidad de introducir la crónica social, las cuales firmaba con el pseudónimo de Solange de Morván. Las crónicas sociales constituyen un aporte de Rosario Sansores al periodismo mexicano, ya que fue un género traído por ella desde La Habana, según sus declaraciones en la entrevista que le hizo Elena Poniatowska:

-Oiga doña Rosario, ¿y ese estilo de escribir, de dónde lo sacó usted?

-De La Habana, niña, de La Habana. Yo aprendí allá el nuevo sistema de hacer crónicas sociales. Los cubanos le dan una gran importancia a los sucesos de sociedad. Se hacen extensas descripciones de la casa, de la mesa, y con frases halagadoras se describe a cada uno de los invitados. Cuando yo regresé a México, después de

colaborar, durante un año en el Diario de la Marina, las crónicas sociales eran sencillamente unas largas listas de nombres... (51)

La cita anterior permite concluir que Rosario Sansores no fue la creadora del género periodístico en cuestión, ya que el mismo lo aprendió en La Habana. Sin embargo, lo que sí es cierto es que las crónicas sociales que ella hacía tenían su sello personal y su propio estilo, yo diría que un tanto poético. Además, sí hubo “notas de sociedad” en casi todos los periódicos mexicanos de la época antes de las columnas de Sansores, generalmente anónimas, que comprendían tertulias, bailes, enfermos, matrimonios, etcétera. Dichas notas no se parecían en nada a las crónicas de sociedad de Rosario Sansores, y como ella muy bien dijo, “las crónicas sociales eran sencillamente unas largas listas de nombres”.

También le dice a D’Acosta que le salieron 400 imitadoras. En este sentido, el periodista Luis Suárez apunta que “la más famosa de las cronistas sociales mexicanas, introductora del género en nuestro medio, e imitada hoy por no pocos colegas suyos que escriben ‘a la Sansores’ sobre los fastos de ‘la alta’, sus bautizos, bodas y aniversarios...” (48). Las citas anteriores demuestran cómo Rosario Sansores a su regreso a su país, no sólo trajo un profundo agradecimiento, recuerdos y palabras cubanas de La Habana, incorporadas a su identidad transnacional, sino que también trajo consigo una nueva manera de hacer periodismo, aprendida en la isla, la cual introdujo en su país.

Antes de terminar quiero también puntualizar que Rosario Sansores a su regreso a La Ciudad de México, el 27 de enero de 1932, queda tan prendada de la riqueza cultural de su país, que se interesa por redescubrir sus raíces y comienza a publicar una crónica titulada “El México que mis ojos ven”, en *La Prensa* de San Antonio, a partir del 4 de febrero de 1932 hasta el 12 de diciembre de 1933. Las mismas tratan temas coloniales, culturales, políticos, etc. Además, debido al interés de Rosario Sansores de redescubrir su país natal visita lugares coloniales, centros de salud, religiosos, a personalidades importantes en los ámbitos políticos y culturales mexicanos, como es el caso del presidente mexicano Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932). Estas crónicas se empezaron a publicar a raíz

de dos crónicas que publicó Rosario Sansores en el mismo periódico: “Impresiones de un viaje” e “Impresiones de México”.

El mismo día que Sansores llega a México escribe “Impresiones de un viaje”, la cual publica en *La Prensa* de San Antonio. La misma dice lo siguiente:

Por un momento, me pregunté si era verdad que yo he vivido cinco años en esta ciudad que ahora me parece totalmente desconocida y donde yo, casi me siento extranjera [...] Yo vengo a mi patria, para conocerla mejor. Quiero adentrarme en su alma. Desde el extranjero, no se le puede juzgar. Hace falta venir a ella, respirar su ambiente, escuchar el comentario de sus hijos humildes y la opinión de sus hombres ilustres. Seguir de cerca. Su movimiento intelectual. Apoyo mis manos trémulas sobre mi corazón y una dulce sensación de dicha me invade. Estoy en mi patria, ¡Ahora, a luchar! El destino dirá la última palabra... (5)

En la cita anterior se notan las ansias con que Rosario Sansores quiere empaparse de su cultura y recuperar el “tiempo perdido”. Sin embargo, a lo largo de la crónica se aprecia una nostalgia por La Habana y desde que Rosario Sansores llega comienza a contrastar a ambas ciudades y a resaltar las cosas positivas y negativas de ambas. Es un momento decisivo para la configuración y consolidación de su identidad transnacional.

Asimismo, la importancia de que se hayan publicado en un periódico hispano en EE.UU., desde mi punto de vista, radica en que contribuyeron a apaciguar la siempre constante nostalgia de los migrantes y exiliados mexicanos en EE.UU., quienes sí tenían acceso a los periódicos, pero muchos no podían regresar a su patria, es decir, en cierta medida satisficieron la ideología del “México de afuera”, con esas pinceladas sansorinas de elogio a su patria.

Además, no sólo se publicaban en EE.UU., sino que también aclara Suárez que Rosario Sansores “comenzó en México escribiendo una

serie de crónicas llamadas ‘El México que mis ojos ven’, descripciones de sus visitas a ciertas instituciones como la Casa Cuna, y otras, y también con temas políticos. Se las publicaba *Excélsior* (*sic*)” (50).

Esta cita da cuenta de que las crónicas de “El México que mis ojos”, no sólo se publicaron en *La Prensa*, en EE.UU., sino que también fueron publicadas en el periódico mexicano, *Excélsior*, uno de los más populares de la época. Además, la cita es importante porque demuestra que Rosario Sansores no sólo mostró en el extranjero su orgullo por ser mexicana, sino que lo hizo evidente en la misma Ciudad de México. Como bien advierte la cita, estas crónicas trataban temas políticos, y puedo agregar que también contaban con profundas reflexiones sobre carácter mexicano o el ser mexicano, lo que está en consonancia con el deseo de Rosario Sansores de redescubrir su país y con el ambiente nacionalista que predominaba en su patria a raíz de la Revolución, al menos en el ámbito literario y periodístico. Esta cita y la sección en general contribuyen a vislumbrar, incluso de una manera más clara y con más detalles que la misma poesía, la transnacionalidad identitaria de Rosario Sansores desde el punto de vista periodístico, a través de sus crónicas y otros artículos.

Este circuito migratorio cultural que realiza nuestra poeta no sólo consolida su mexicanidad, sino que, como se ha visto, enriquece su identidad y la torna transnacional al estar en contacto con el/lo otro facilitado por el viaje. La melancolía presente en sus poemas advierte del profundo afecto que Rosario Sansores profesó toda su vida por su país natal, pero también advierte su transnacionalismo al emerger lazos de identificación con su país adoptivo.

Incluso, se ha apreciado con la obra de Rosario Sansores que no sólo se cruzan barreras nacionales con la migración o con el viaje, también se cruzan barreras regionales, porque a pesar de que la mexicanidad de Rosario Sansores siempre estuvo a flor de piel, ella se sentía muy yucateca y hay que recordar que inclusive pudo adoptar una postura bastante radical en este sentido, debido al detalle de “el país natal”.

Es interesante cómo, independientemente de que su identidad mexicana siempre se trató de desdibujar en los periódicos hispanos

en EE.UU. (lo cual tal vez fue una confusión y no un acto deliberado), en México también era prácticamente desconocida, incluso por los intelectuales mexicanos de la época. Sin embargo, tanto amigos como la misma Rosario Sansores no escatimaron oportunidades para recordar que era mexicana, y una mexicana que sabía poner muy en alto el nombre de patria a través de sus acciones, poemas, crónicas, cuentos, en fin, a través de toda su obra. Lo lamentablemente es que hasta la fecha Rosario Sansores sigue siendo prácticamente una desconocida para su país.

Índice de fotos:

Fig. 1: Rosario Sansores, *circa* 1937. Colección particular, plata sobre gelatina. Fotógrafo Dresler. Foto facilitada por la nieta de Rosario Sansores, Sra. Beatriz Núñez Sanjenís.

Fig. 2: Rosario Sansores (1935). Colección particular, plata sobre gelatina. Foto facilitada por la nieta de Rosario Sansores, Sra. Beatriz Núñez Sanjenís.

Notas

¹ He tenido acceso a todo este material gracias al Proyecto Recovery de la Universidad de Houston, fundado y dirigido por el Dr. Nicolás Kanellos.

² Este es un recorte de un artículo que me proporcionó la familia Miranda, parientes de Rosario Sansores, desafortunadamente no se acuerdan de dónde lo tomaron.

³ Este fue publicado en la Ciudad de México en el libro de versos escogidos, *Mientras se va la vida* (1925), el cual fue promocionado, casi cada semana, en *La Prensa* de San Antonio a partir del 25 de agosto de 1929 hasta el 20 de abril de 1930, aproximadamente.

⁴ Este poema fue posteriormente publicado en *Mientras se va la vida* (1925).

⁵ La primera edición de este libro salió en La Habana en 1921.

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Don Cheto, “El Cronista del Pueblo”: Una Reactualización del Mito del “Don” y Validación de una Memoria Colectiva de la Comunidad Mexicana Transnacional en Estados Unidos

Esther Díaz Martín

Abstract

Don Cheto, mediante su iconografía y actuación en el espacio televisivo, radial y virtual, construye un mundo figurado en el cual la comunidad inmigrante mexicana participa en la evaluación, revaloración y recuperación de valores tradicionales y memoria colectiva. En este ensayo examino cómo Don Cheto apropia y utiliza la voz moral de la comunidad inmigrante mexicana, especialmente en su papel como cuentista o “el cronista del pueblo.” Sostengo que a través de su iconografía, lemas y actuación Don Cheto da materia para una nostalgia reflexiva cual termina por reclamar el valor de las vivencias e historias colectivas como fuentes de una sabiduría comunal. Esto implica un impulso por construir un proyecto identitario arraigado a una memoria colectiva construida por los participantes del mundo figurado a través de sus interacciones en el espacio radial y virtual.

Don Cheto es un rapero, animador de televisión y DJ de 67 años de edad originario de La Sauceda, Michoacán, que radica en Los Ángeles, California.¹ Es un personaje cómico, ranchero, ingenioso, humilde e indudablemente michoacano. Además de ser una de las

1. Alonso González Bañuelas, “Don Cheto: alcanzando el éxito a los 67 años.” *Excelsior: El Periódico Latino del Condado de Orange*, June 18, 2009, <http://www.ocexcelsior.com/articles/233xito-782-historia-alcanzando.html>.

personalidades principales de la emisora Estrella TV de Los Ángeles, es la figura principal de su programa radial “El Show de Don Cheto”. Este programa se transmite en varias zonas metropolitanas de Estados Unidos, en algunas estaciones en México y a través del internet y la aplicación TuneIn Radio.² También tiene una presencia en las redes sociales y YouTube. El mundo que se construye alrededor de este personaje representa una colectividad mexicana transnacional, urbana y rural, de clase obrera y transgeneracional. La familia de Don Cheto, consiste de su esposa Carmela, una adicta a las compras en Wal-Mart; su hijo Encarnación, quien no quiso estudiar por andar de “cholo” y ahora gana \$18.00 trabajando en construcción; y su hija Sanjuana, quien se juntó con un “cholo” y tuvo un hijo al que Don Cheto llama “Briancito”. El transporte familiar es un Astro-Van modelo 1986.³ Mediante una iconografía que mezcla símbolos rurales con urbanos y una actuación en múltiples espacios mediáticos, Don Cheto construye un espacio donde la comunidad inmigrante mexicana en los Estados Unidos participa en la valoración de su memoria colectiva. En este ensayo examino la manera en que Don Cheto reactualiza el mito del Don y se apropia de una voz moral en su papel como “el cronista del pueblo”. La voz moral de Don Cheto sirve para establecer un mundo figurado transnacional y transgeneracional en el cual los participantes de este mundo colaboran en una reflexión sobre la identidad y el proyecto moral de su comunidad. Sostengo que su papel como “el cronista del pueblo” reclama el valor de las vivencias e historias colectivas como fuentes de una sabiduría comunal.

Mi materia de estudio incluye entrevistas, videos de rap, segmentos radiales, fotomontajes y publicaciones subidas a sus cuentas en las redes sociales. Las entrevistas permiten vislumbrar algunos de los elementos que construyen el mito del Don y su papel dentro de un mundo figurado de acuerdo al personaje mismo. La iconografía en los

2. “Aquí Suena - Que Buena 105.5 / 94.3FM | Don Cheto,” EstrellaTV, accessed 13 December, 2013, <http://aquisuena.estrellatv.com/locutores/don-cheto/>.

3. “Don Cheto, el nuevo fenómeno de la radio en E.U” *El Valenciano Michoacán* (blog). February 16, 2009, <http://elvalencianomich.webs.com/apps/blog/show/463018-don-cheto-el-nuevo-fenomeno-de-la-radio-en-e-u->.

fotomontajes revela la centralidad de la masculinidad del personaje en su construcción del mito del Don. Asimismo, el segmento "El Casanova de Michoacán" presenta y a la vez parodia nociones machistas de la masculinidad mexicana reemplazándolas con nociones conservadoras que refuerzan su papel como voz moral. Los videos de rap demuestran un diálogo transgeneracional que parodia y a la vez rescata los valores tradicionales del "rancho" y, asimismo, cuestiona y celebra la cultura urbana. En estos ejemplos, Don Cheto es el padre de familia consternado por la pérdida de la conexión con el pasado y los valores tradicionales. Finalmente, discuto el segmento "Las historias de Don Cheto" y cómo en su papel de "el cronista del pueblo" Don Cheto emplea el arte del cuentacuentos dándole su toque michoacano y angelino. En esta práctica se observa un proceso de transmisión de sabiduría y una propuesta sobre la identidad y el proyecto moral de la comunidad mexicana transnacional. Mi investigación está basada en material radial reunido entre septiembre del 2013 y febrero del 2014 y material disponible en YouTube, Facebook y Twitter.

Marco teórico

Al hablar de la construcción y reactualización del mito, parto desde la definición de Roland Barthes en *Mythologies* (1972). Barthes propone que el mito es un habla despolitizada o "depolitized speech". Se trata de un tipo de discurso o sistema de comunicación verbal y visual que normaliza un mensaje sobre la identidad de la nación que beneficia al grupo en poder. Esto ocurre a través de un juego de símbolos que confunden la historia con la cultura.⁴ Chela Sandoval examina esta dinámica desde la perspectiva de los grupos marginados y propone el concepto de una metodología del oprimido o "methodology of the oppressed" que se refiere a la manera en que los grupos marginados se apropian de los mitos con el fin de interrumpirlos, vaciarlos y reconstruirlos.⁵ Entiendo el concepto de "voz" como un discurso desde

4. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 142-143.

5. Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 108-109.

una posición identitaria que articula ciertos valores y epistemología que entra en disputa con otras voces en el ámbito público. Ejercer una voz es manifestar una conciencia sobre las relaciones de poder en la sociedad y el lugar desde dónde se posiciona una identidad.⁶ Pensando en la identidad no solo del individuo sino de un colectivo, aplico el concepto de "mundo figurado" de Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner y Cain. El mundo figurado es un espacio donde las personas participan con el fin de construir un sentido de identidad, o donde la gente "figura" quienes son.⁷ Empleo el concepto de la memoria colectiva propuesto por Maurice Halbwachs como una memoria sobre los procesos de concientización en el cual una comunidad otorga significado a su propio pasado. Esta concientización se organiza alrededor de las similitudes y semejanzas, y resulta en la formación de una identidad atemporal. Es decir, una identidad que nos conecta a nivel personal con las experiencias pasadas del grupo como si fueran nuestras propias experiencias.⁸ El concepto de memoria colectiva dialoga con la idea del cuentacuentos y su papel como transmisor de la sabiduría de una generación a la siguiente. Cuando el cuentacuentos agrega su propio estilo y experiencias a la historia, se sitúa como un actor atemporal y forma un enlace con el pasado que le permite que un grupo forme su identidad.⁹

El mundo figurado de Don Cheto

Juan Carlos Razo, el joven de 33 años detrás del personaje de Don Cheto, creció en La Sauceda, Michoacán, al cuidado de su abuela Adelaida de quien aprendió muchas de las frases, dichos e historias que usa en el show. A los 16 años, Razo emigró a Estados Unidos y se graduó

6. Bernadette Baker, "What Is Voice? Issues of Identity and Representation in the Framing of Reviews," *Review of Educational Research* 69.4 (2000): 366, 369.

7. D. Holland, W. Lachiocotte, D. Skinner, and C. Cain, *Identity and Agency in Cultural World* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 49.

8. Halbwachs, Maurice, "The Collective Memory" in *The Collective Memory Reader* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 145-147.

9. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 84-100 y Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), (86-87).

de South El Monte High School en el área Este de Los Ángeles.¹⁰ Vivió doce años "de ilegal"¹¹ y después de trabajar en varias fábricas empezó a vender tacos afuera de las estaciones de radio. Allí empezó a relacionarse con los personajes de la radio quienes le ayudaron a estudiar locución y lo aceptaron como aprendiz por un año. Durante este tiempo, sacó su primer álbum de rap como Don Cheto, "Hablandolo por lo claro" y finalmente consiguió su programa matutino. Juan Carlos Razo atribuye su éxito a que el personaje Don Cheto hace a los radioescuchas recordar "a la gente mayor de allá de nuestros pueblitos y parece como si estuviera oyendo a mi abuelito, mi papá o mi tío".¹²

Holland et al. señalan la manera en que la producción de mundos figurados involucra la abstracción de regularidades significantes de la vida cotidiana, un "standard plot" que convierte las expectativas sobre cómo se deben desarrollar e interpretar ciertos eventos de acuerdo a las abstracciones basadas en eventos pasados.¹³ El "standard plot" del mundo figurado de Don Cheto es el de la familia inmigrante que pasa por ciertos ritos que reflejan la experiencia de encontrar un espacio dentro de la cultura estadounidense. La historia de Juan Carlos Razo, por ejemplo, refleja la experiencia de miles de jóvenes estadounidenses de las últimas décadas; cruzamos "de ilegales" pero, con una mezcla de suerte, trabajo y ganas hemos llegado a las aulas de las universidades o a posiciones de mando en diferentes empresas públicas y privadas. Esta identificación con la narrativa del mundo figurado es un primer paso de iniciación que convoca la asociación de nuevos participantes. Exploraré otros ejemplos del "standard plot" de la familia inmigrante mexicana más adelante en mi discusión sobre el padre michoacano y sus hijos angelinos. Pero, primero, discutiré los elementos que componen a Don Cheto como personaje y voz moral.

10. Ibid.

11. González, "Don Cheto: alcanzando el éxito."

12. "Don Cheto, el nuevo fenómeno."

13. Holland et al. *Identity and Agency*, 53.

El mito del “Don”... y su bigote

Llamarse “Don” es el elemento principal que le otorga a este personaje una posición de autoridad moral dentro de su mundo figurado. Un “Don” es una persona que se ha ganado el respeto de su comunidad. El término viene del latín *dominus* que significa “señor”; tratamiento que en la antigüedad sólo se reservaba para Dios y posteriormente se expandió su uso hacia los eclesiásticos y la nobleza. Con la conquista de América algunos conquistadores empezaron a apropiarse del término y empezó un proceso de “endonamiento” a cualquier persona que accedía a algún cargo de relevancia y después a los caciques e indios principales. Ya a partir del siglo XVIII el “Don” se extendió a, “todos los blancos de buen nivel social”.¹⁴ En *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) de Amparo Ruiz de Burton, el Don representa la tradición del rancharo/hidalgo vinculado a la vida doméstica de la antigua California. El Don es consciente de sus sentimientos y encuentra su máxima expresión en el héroe del corrido.¹⁵ De una manera similar Don Cheto reflexiona sobre su estatus social: “La gente siempre ha sido muy respetuosa conmigo, como me ven viejito no me reclaman nada”.¹⁶ El “Don” lo sitúa también como hombre de familia y lo obliga a llevar un comportamiento moral. Don Cheto explica: “Me da gusto que me vean como un viejito que no dice doble sentido ni cosas sexuales”.¹⁷ Siguiendo la tradición del rancharo sentimental, en ocasiones Don Cheto admite sentirse “tiernito” y llora cuando se siente despreciado por parte de su co-locutora Marlene “La vozalona” o por su audiencia.

El Don no es Don sin un buen bigote que recalque su hombría. Entre la iconografía de Don Cheto, (sombrero, guayabera, Jordans, etc.), el bigote es un elemento fundamental que apoya la construcción de su voz

14. Prudencio Bustos Argañaraz, “Orígenes de los apellidos hispanoamericanos,” *Boletín del Centro de Estudios Genealógicos de Córdoba*, N° 26 (1997): 19-25.

15. Alberto Varon, “The Interior Frontier Man: The Squatter and the Don, the Conquest of Manhood and the Making of Mexican-American Literature” in *Recovering the US Hispanic Literary Heritage* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 2009), 118-120.

16. González, “Don Cheto: alcanzando.”

17. Ibid.

moral. El hombre que decide llevar bigote manifiesta que es un "hombre entre hombres", patriarca y figura de autoridad que, a diferencia del hombre afeitado (civilizado), es independiente y sigue sus propias reglas. Llevar bigote, además, implica ciertas pretensiones sobre la persona que lo lleva puesto.¹⁸ El bigote de Don Cheto juega con la pretensión del macho mexicano y su virilidad, vanidad, y prepotencia sobre el género femenino. Una útil comparación es el canoso bigote de Don Cheto vs. el negro y vigoroso bigote del charro por excelencia, Vicente Fernández, "el Mero Macho". El bigote mexicano significa un sujeto viril, vanidoso y un ser solitario e incomprensido.¹⁹ El bigote de Vicente Fernández, "El Rey", es una parte esencial de su imagen de charro aunque este contraste con la blanca cabellera de un hombre de 73 años de edad.²⁰ Su lema y las pretensiones del bigote mexicano encuentran su máxima expresión en la canción "El rey":

Yo sé bien que estoy afuera
Pero el día que yo me muera
Sé que me vas a llorar
Dirás que no me quisiste
Pero vas a estar muy triste
Y así te vas a quedar.²¹

"El rey" es un hombre subestimado, despreciado e incomprensido pero "rey" a fin de cuentas en su propio mundo narcisista. Estar afuera lo posiciona no como un marginado, sino como un ser soberano poseedor de una autoridad superior e independiente. Don Cheto se vincula

18. Christopher Oldstone-Moore, "Mustaches and Masculine Codes in Early Twentieth-Century America," *Journal of social history*, 45.1 (2011): 48.

19. Redacción, "Vicente Fernández dejará crecer su bigote por 'respeto al público.'" *Tvnotas*. November 26, 2013, <http://www.tvnotas.com.mx/2012/11/26/C-42511-vicente-fernandez-dejara-crecer-su-bigote-por-respeto-al-publico.php>.

20. Victor Macías-González and Rubenstein, Anne, eds., *Masculinity in Modern Mexico*, (Albuquerque: Univeristy of New Mexico Press, 2012) 248, 260.

21. José Alfredo Jiménez, *El Rey* (Mexico: RCA/VICTOR, 1971), <http://www.mariachi.com.mx/josealfredojimenez/audioteca/elrey.htm>.

explícitamente a esta mitología en un fotomontaje que publicó en su página de Facebook. La imagen usa la portada del álbum “Historia de un ídolo Vol. II” de Vicente Fernández y re-emplaza la cara de Fernández por la de Don Cheto. Unos días después publicó otro fotomontaje similar usando la imagen del Marlboro Man, su contraparte anglosajona (Figura 1).



Figura 1: Historia de un ídolo (17 Enero 2014), Marlboro Man (27 Enero 2014). (Cortesía de Liberman Broadcasting).

El bigote como símbolo de un soberano apoya la construcción de la voz moral. El primer plano de significación (hablando en términos de Barthes²²) nos muestra un bigote grueso y envejecido. El bigote representa una expresión masculina marcada por ciertos valores (el hombre entre hombres, anti-social, soberano, incomprendido, etc.). A nivel de mito, el bigote envejecido nos dice que el macho mexicano insiste en ser parte de la cultura contemporánea aunque ya en menor potencia o como elemento nostálgico.

22. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 115.

El Casanova de Michoacán

La gran panza de Don Cheto, la cual exagera cuando reposa sus manos sobre ella, es un elemento icónico que pone su virilidad en juego pues recuerda más al papá Noel que un Giovanni Casanova (Figura 2).



Figura 2: Don Cheto con las manos entrelazadas sobre la panza²³. (Cortesía de Don Cheto)

No obstante, Don Cheto insiste en su virilidad empleando el lema del “cual debí” para recalcar cuando un enunciado insiste en la idea de un macho ideal.²⁴ Por ejemplo, añadió el hashtag “#cualdebi” a la foto que subió a su página en Facebook al lado de la hipersexualizada diva de la canción ranchera, Ana Bárbara.²⁵ Pero también añadió

23. “Aquí Suená.”

24. “Cual debí” es una pronunciación exagerada de la expresión “cual debe”. Se usa como afirmación a una expresión sobre algo hecho de la manera más aceptable. Usualmente tiene que ver con afirmaciones sobre los deberes basado en género pero también se aplica a otros temas. La variación fonética recalca la pronunciación regional michoacana aplicada a palabras que terminan con “e” o “es”.

25. Don Cheto’s Facebook page, posted November 25, 2013.

el hashtag a la foto de una burra vestida con pantalón de mezclilla y camiseta con el comentario “lista pal pari en la noche”.²⁶ La mujer trofeo es un accesorio para el hombre macho, pero la burra “Talia” burla la noción del macho heterosexual al hacer referencia a la bestialidad, de esta manera se interrumpe el mito del macho mujeriego pues no se trata de conquistar a las mujeres sino de una hembra de cualquier especie mamífera. Según Sandoval, la metodología del oprimido reapropia y redistribuye la ideología y hace que el lenguaje de emancipación sea más variado, flexible y adaptable. La conciencia del oprimido tiene la habilidad de penetrar la ideología dominante con el fin de volcarla. Se guía por un código ideológico ético comprometido con la justicia social para establecer una redistribución igualitaria de poder en cuanto a diferentes códigos de raza, género, sexo, nación, cultura y distinciones de clase.²⁷ En estos ejemplos de la aplicación del lema “cual debí” Don Cheto pone en juego el código ideológico de género para llamar la atención a lo que se supone que debe ser la actuación del macho y así, a través de la parodia, interrumpe el poder del discurso machista.

El segmento radial “El Casanova de Michoacán”, ofrece otro ejemplo de este proceso de re-significación. Primero Don Cheto se describe como el experto en la conquista amorosa y ofrece su sabiduría a los radioescuchas: “El Casanova de Michoacán te enseñará cómo terminar una relación como caballero en @showdedoncheto a las 6:06am Opina al 1-866-446-6653”.²⁸ Los radioescuchas masculinos llaman al programa o mandan mensajes por las redes sociales para presumir sus conquistas románticas. Marlene o “La Vozalona”, su co-locutora experta en los chismes de “las Kardashians” y la vida loca del barrio, juega un papel importante en el cuestionamiento y contra discurso que interrumpe la noción del Casanova. Para Marlene el Casanova tiene que ser un hombre elegante y adinerado que asiste a eventos de alta cultura, estilo James Bond, y no un camionero que conquista mujeres desesperadas

26. Ibid., posted November 28, 2013. “Pari” es una forma fonética de “party” o fiesta. La fonética refleja una pronunciación hispanizada.

27. Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 112.

28. @QueBuena LA, Twitter, 8 Mayo 2013.

por Facebook.²⁹ Al final del segmento, Don Cheto rinde juicio sobre las tácticas de conquista de los participantes empleando una escala del uno al diez. El segmento usualmente termina con una anécdota de Don Cheto de algún episodio de su vida romántica que demuestra su dominio del arte casanovista. Sin falta, el relato se trata de la conquista de Carmela, su esposa ficticia. Durante alguna fiesta o kermés del pueblo, por ejemplo, Don Cheto enamora a Carmela con algún gesto romántico que los lleva al matrimonio. En una ocasión, Don Cheto invita a Carmela a comer pozole. Mientras comían el primer plato Don Cheto se prepara para enunciar su declaración romántica con la cual le pedirá matrimonio a Carmela. La historia culmina cuando al levantarse a traer un segundo plato de pozole Don Cheto se pone nervioso y suelta un grito: "¿Qué pues te casas conmigo o qué?" A lo que Carmela responde, "Sí, sí ándale...pero díles que le pongan más repollo".³⁰ La anécdota final interrumpe y vacía el mito del Casanova al burlar la idea de los grandes gestos románticos y las múltiples parejas. El Casanova de Michoacán valora la vida doméstica y el matrimonio. El diálogo entre los radioescuchas y Marlene ponen en debate el ideal masculino y al final Don Cheto, como voz moral de su mundo figurado, logra subvertir la ideología dominante del macho mujeriego a través de su anécdota personal como el verdadero y único Casanova de Michoacán.

Aquí nadie me entiende: el patriarca michoacano y sus hijos angelinos

Don Cheto usa el hip hop para explorar los puntos de tensión entre la cultura mexicana y anglosajona, especialmente la tensión entre valores tradicionales (rurales) y modernos (urbanos). En el dueto "Estoy enamorada" un padre lucha por imponer una moral anticuada a su hija adolescente,

Don Cheto: Entiende mi muchacha/No es que no lo quiera/Es que estás muy chica pa que ya andes de noviera
Yolanda Pérez: Él si me quiere *dad* ¿Qué no te acuerdas

29. Resumen de transmisiones entre octubre y diciembre, 2013.

30. Transmisión de enero, 2014

dad? Tú a mi mamá te la robaste cuando ella tenía mi edad
 Don Cheto: Pues sí, sí me la robé pero ella sabía tortear en fogón, ¡Tú puro microwave!³¹

En su juventud, como buen macho, Don Cheto robó a la mujer que quería, es decir, impuso su propia ley sin importar ni las reglas de la sociedad ni el derecho de la mujer. Además, lo que justificó el robo fue que la mujer ya sabía tortear. En este mundo figurado, para la generación que representa Don Cheto, el saber hacer tortillas es el elemento del trabajo femenino más importante que sostiene el núcleo familiar. Pero también conlleva una connotación sexual al igual que la frase "comerse el tamal" pues en la cosmología mesoamericana el ciclo de reproducción del maíz y las etapas de la vida humana siguen vías paralelas.³² Reclamarle esto a su hija es ridículo ya que hoy en día las tortillas se compran o bien ya no son una parte importante de la dieta norteamericana y la forma de vida mexicana de una nueva generación que reside en Estados Unidos. El fetiche de las tortillas hechas a mano, por otra parte, también significa la idea de la mujer atendiendo al hombre, pues las tortillas hechas a mano se sirven a la orden. El reclamo machista de Don Cheto está fuera de tiempo, pues no quiere aceptar el estatus social de la mujer contemporánea.

El mito del macho incomprendido, el que no encaja con la cultura dominante, aparece en el dueto "Vámonos pal rancho". La conversación entre padre mexicano e hijo mexicanoamericano expone lo que la siguiente generación está por perder la conexión a las raíces ancestrales y la conexión con la tierra a través del trabajo agricultor.

Hijo: Aquí es donde he nacido/ Aquí es donde he crecido/ No quiero ir a México/ Porque está muy aburrido
 Don Cheto: Muchacho atarantao/ No sabes lo que dices/ Allá están tus abuelos/ Allá están tus raíces

31. Yolanda Pérez, *Estoy enamorada ft. Don Cheto* (Los Angeles: Fonovisa Inc., 2003), <http://www.yolandaperez.com/en/videos.html>.

32. González, R. J. *Zapotec science: Farming and food in the Northern Sierra of Oaxaca*. (Austin: University of Texas Press 2001), 130-174.

Hijo: Ya no esté molestando/ ¿No ve que estoy jugando?

Don Cheto: Con ese Play Station/ Te la pasas huevoneando/
Cuando yo tenía tu edad/ Ya andaba yo sembrando³³

En los últimos versos concluye, "Aquí nadie me entiende, nadie me comprende/ Ya me voy pal rancho/ Me voy muy agüitao³⁴/ Por qué aquí en este norte, parece que estoy pintao".³⁵ En vez de ser un hombre de respeto, un líder prominente de la comunidad, aquí Don Cheto queda "pintao", es decir, afuera, incomprendido, despreciado.

En estos dos ejemplos Don Cheto queda fuera de su tiempo y espacio, pero su actuación sirve para una reflexión nostálgica en el sentido que plantea Svetlana Boym. La "nostalgia reflexiva" es aquella que no trata de reinstalar y volver estáticas las imágenes del pasado sino que se da cuenta que la historia humana e individual tiene final. Lo que hace es recuperar y celebrar los fragmentos del pasado con el fin de temporalizar y estimar las memorias, lo cual puede resultar en un efecto humorístico o irónico.³⁶ Don Cheto, como padre en crisis, narra la evolución de la identidad colectiva que pasó de ser rural y machista a urbana, bicultural y progresiva.

El cronista del pueblo

En su ensayo, *The Storyteller: Reflections on the Work of Nikokai Leskov* (1970), Walter Benjamin describe al cuentista medieval como aquél que viajaba y conocía otras tierras. También podía ser aquella persona que sabía todas las historias locales y compartía sus vivencias y las historias que había aprendido localmente o en tierras lejanas.³⁷ Con la entrada de la época moderna, el cuentista dejó de ser la fuerza presente

33. Don Cheto, *Vamonos 'Pal Rancho (I Don't Wanna Leave L.A.)* (Florida: Sony Discos, 2013), <http://www.songlyrics.com/don-cheto/vamos-pa-l-rancho-lyrics/>.

34. Agüitado, herido, triste

35. Ibid.

36. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49-50.

37. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 84-85.

e inmediata que alguna vez fue antes de la revolución industrial.³⁸ El declive en la práctica de contar historias refleja un síntoma de la época moderna; la preferencia por la información sobre la sabiduría.³⁹ En la época de la televisión, el internet, y el conocimiento enciclopédico de la humanidad al alcance de unos movimientos del dedo índice, ¿cómo se explica, entonces, la popularidad de las historias de Don Cheto?⁴⁰

Primeramente, Don Cheto cumple con las características señaladas por Benjamin. Como inmigrante originario de Michoacán, es alguien que viene de un lugar lejano pero, como representante de una persona que sigue conectada a su identidad regional es también el experto en las historias locales (de Michoacán). Por lo tanto, Don Cheto, como cuentista, mantiene viva la memoria colectiva del pueblo y el ritual de transferencia de experiencias que lleva a la transferencia de sabiduría. La sabiduría, propone Benjamin, que se transmite a través de la practica de contar cuentos, no tiene que ver con el contenido del cuento en sí, sino con la manera en que la historia es transferida y recibida entre el narrador y su audiencia. En general, lo que se relata en las historias son experiencias y estas experiencias tienen el potencial de convertirse en sabiduría por arte del cuentista. A diferencia de la novela o del periódico, el arte de contar historias pertenece al mundo vivo, es una especie de comunicación auténtica porque tiene el potencial de convertirse en sabiduría para el oyente. La sabiduría no se encuentra en el mensaje de la historia sino en la integración del cuentista en la narrativa del cuento. O como explica Benjamin "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel".⁴¹ Por ejemplo en el cuento de "El taquero y el pobre" Don Cheto cuenta:

DON CHETO: Miren les voy a contar una historia del sabio ermitaño. Resulta que había una vez que había un hombre que taba muy pobre. Un hombre que taba muy pobre, muy pobre,

38. Ibid., 83.

39. Ibid., 87.

40. Una búsqueda en YouTube da más de mil resultados.

41. Ibid., 91-92.

muy pobre. Pero una pobreza perrés⁴². Aquí una persona pobre, hay de diferentes niveles como todo el mundo, pero que una persona pobre es el que anda por la calle jalando un carrito de la marqueta con unas cobijas. ¿Eda? Es una persona pobre. Pero en los pueblos es una persona pos ora si que más pobre todavía. ¿Por qué? Aquí tu te vas y esas gentes tienen shelteres, que se llama shelter ¿eda? (Marlene: mmh hmm) El que no tiene casa, no tiene hogar tienen un shelteres donde se le da de comer si ellos quieren diario, diario. Hay shelteres, hay lugares donde puedan dormir. Aquí en Los Angeles, California hay un lugar que se llama eskai ro⁴³, mucha gente ha oído el nombre pero no no no... ¿Tú pasas por esas calles Vozales? Tapizao de gente durmiendo en el piso.

MARLENE: No, si nosotros llevábamos bolsas de ropa ahí.

DON CHETO: ¿Quiénes son nosotros?

MARLENE: Mi mamá, mi mamá, agarraba su carrito que tenía, un carrito de dos puertas que (risas) llegó una grúa y se lo llevó una vez, este... íbamos y cuando ya mis hermanos no querían la ropa íbamos y decía "agarrar la ropa" íbamos a downtown L.A. ahí donde están y la dejábamos y ahí venían los wainitos y agarraban la ropa.

EL BORO: Bravo

DON CHETO: Sí me dijo un señor, un wainito⁴⁴ de los de ahí. Vienen unas güeritas pero vienen a cambiar (Carcajadas de Marlene) ¿a ver que traen? Qué traen ahí? Si quieren la playera nos dan toda esa bolsa de botes que trae ahí. Bueno... entonces ahí en ese pueblo donde le cuento la leyenda, taba este hombre muy pobre, muy pobre...⁴⁵

42. de "perra"

43. Skid Row

44. de vino, persona que toma vino

45. "El taquero y el pobre-1x04 Historias de Don Cheto," YouTube video, 15:38, posted by "historiasdedoncheto," April 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mI7j3l3Cl0c>.

Es evidente que Don Cheto no está leyendo la historia porque hay bastante repetición y neologismos originales como "perrés" (para decir pobreza perra, o vil pobreza) y en la manera en que interactúa para relacionar las experiencias de Marlene y los radioescuchas al imaginario del cuento cuando hace la comparación entre los pobres de Skid Row y el pobre del cuento. Don Cheto, también improvisa un chiste sobre las "güeritas" que van a intercambiar playeras por las bolsas de botes de aluminio y plástico de las personas. Según Benjamin, el cuento se hunde en la experiencia del cuentacuentos y esta experiencia sale a luz en la narrativa y con ella algo del aura del cuentacuentos.⁴⁶

En el ritual de contar cuentos se abre el espacio para la transferencia de sabiduría cuando el cuento involucra la petición de un consejo. En el caso de la historia del pobre y el taquero, el taquero consulta al sabio ermitaño para que decidiera si el pobre debía pagar un peso por poner su pan sobre el vapor de la carne de su guisado. El narrador y el público van desarrollando el consejo juntos a medida que se entiende cual es la cuestión (moral) que se debe contestar. Benjamin concluye que el propósito de la narración es llegar al contenido moral, el consejo, o la aproximación de un máximo.⁴⁷ La narración llega a un punto en el cual el narrador debe callar y dejar que el público transforme la experiencia contada en sabiduría sin la intervención del cuenta cuentos. El oyente tiene que hacer sus propias conexiones psicológicas, llegar a sus propias conclusiones.⁴⁸ En el caso de pobre y el taquero, Don Cheto termina la historia:

El sabio ermitaño mira al hombre y le dice, ¿cómo ve trae usted un peso para pagarle al señor? No, no traigo un peso si tuviera un peso hubiera comprado un taco no aaaa un mendigo vapor. El sabio ermitaño dice bueno, ya que el pobre ha gozao del vapor de sus puestos de tacos, ya que este pobre hombre ha gozado sin tener que, sin tener por qué, de un vapor que no le pertenece, debe de pagar por ese vapor, dice el sabio ermitaño. El vagabundo

46. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 91-92, 100.

47. *Ibid.*, 86.

48. *Ibid.*, 89.

se agüita y dice... El sabio ermitaño saca una moneda de un peso y le dice, aquí está la moneda, yo voy a pagar por el señor. El vagabundo sonríe como diciendo este viejito va a pagar por mí. El sabio ermitaño toma la moneda. El taquero extiende la mano. El sabio ermitaño la agarra, se agacha, y le pega a la moneda en una piedra. Tan. Ahí está, para pagarle su humo. Le voy a pagar con el sonido de la moneda.

(risa sofocada de Don Cheto. MARLENE: haaa) Hmm? El hombre está agarrando el humo. ¿Con qué se paga el humo? ¿Él que alegaba? Es que los tacos están en mi plancha y en mi carne y ese es mi vapor. El sabio ermitaño dijo, el sonido es el de la moneda, si él se hubiera comido un taco, se le da la moneda. Pero como es el puro vapor, yo le pago con el sonido de la moneda. Y ya después sí le dio el peso al señor que ya después se fue muy contento. Y colorín colorado este cuento se ha acabado. Historia más del sabio ermitaño que es mi tío. (TODOS: ahh)

Aunque Don Cheto repite el final de la historia no explica cuál es la moraleja ni la lección que se puede aprender (¿al cobro injusto un pago justo? ¿hay una diferencia entre esencia y materia?). Cada radioescucha tendrá que llegar a sus propias conclusiones y por medio de ese proceso se transmite la experiencia, se crea la sabiduría y se reproduce la memoria colectiva. Por ser un intercambio entre seres vivos, esta transacción ocurre en un espacio de convivencia y reflexión. Esto permite la recepción del consejo y despierta la sabiduría.⁴⁹

La experiencia que recibe el oyente es un regalo por parte del cuentista. El narrador ha hecho un acto de generosidad y éste se debe pagar con otra historia, con un comentario o algún tipo de prueba de apreciación.⁵⁰ En *El Conde Lucanor*, por ejemplo, el conde terminaba por aprobar del consejo de Patronio y prometía tomar una decisión que reflejara la moraleja de la historia. En *Mil y una noches* los personajes interrumpen la historia para relatar sus propias historias. La audiencia

49. Peter Brooks, *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1994), 86-87.

50. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 87.

de Don Cheto demuestra reciprocidad pidiéndole que repita alguna historia, mandándole historias o libros de leyendas locales que pueda usar, preguntándoles si conoce alguna u otra historia, o grabando las historias y subiéndolas a YouTube.

Lo interesante es cómo la narración de historias es tan bien recibida por un público que se supone prefiere la rápida sucesión de imágenes e ideas de la cultura del espectáculo por encima de las formas más íntimas y reflexivas de narración. Nestor García Canclini comparte la preocupación de Benjamin en que al perder la tradición oral se pone en riesgo la conexión entre pasado y futuro perdiéndonos "un presente sin memoria" donde "el predominio de la acción espectacular [se prefiere] sobre formas más reflexivas e íntimas de narración".⁵¹ Si las historias reflejan un yo colectivo y un ayer,⁵² lo que está en juego es la memoria colectiva pues esta se transmite de una generación a otra a través de las historias. Las historias de Don Cheto deberán aquietar, en parte, dichas preocupaciones pues su recepción demuestra que la tradición oral no ha dejado de practicarse y además toma un espacio en los medios masivos. Si, como plantea Benjamin, el escuchar historias en tiempos medievales pertenecía al espacio arrullador del hilado,⁵³ en Los Ángeles y la sociedad automotriz estadounidense en general, el susurro del tráfico se convierte en el espacio donde tal vez la mente entra en un estado de monotonía lo suficiente arrullador para recibir la experiencia del cuentista.

Conclusión

Un mundo figurado es un lugar en donde los participantes encuentran sentido sobre sí mismos, un lugar donde figuran quienes son como colectividad.⁵⁴ Lo que demuestra Don Cheto en su actuación

51. García Canclini, Néstor, *Consumidores y ciudadanos: conflictos multiculturales de la globalización* (México: Grijalbo, 1995), 35.

52. Abad E Rodriguez, and Benita Prieto, *Te Cuento Para Que Cuentas: Animación a La Lectura Y Conocimiento De La Narrativa Oral* (Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2007), 21.

53. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 92.

54. Holland et al., *Identity and Agency*, 45.

como autoridad moral es un reto a ciertas identidades estancadas como la noción del patriarca y del macho mujeriego. Además reta la noción del inmigrante inculto pues como cuentacuentos Don Cheto protagoniza el papel de guía moral e historiador. La evocación a participar en un proceso de nostalgia reflexiva reta, además, el mandato hacia la asimilación a la cultura anglosajona norteamericana. Don Cheto no representa una nostalgia que estanca a la comunidad mexicana en una lamentación del pasado perdido, sino que hace reflexionar en cuanto a los fragmentos culturales que vale la pena celebrar, los que sirven para reír, y los que sirven para pensar. En vez de crear una perspectiva inmóvil de un horizonte sin fondo y una repetición desconcertante, el mundo figurado de Don Cheto crea un espacio donde los participantes pueden encontrar un sentido de dirección, como lo sugiere Walter Benjamin, en cuanto lo que se hizo y lo que falta por hacer desde la continuidad del pasado.⁵⁵ Los mitos con los que juega Don Cheto nos hacen recordar y estimar los vestigios del machismo y del patriarcado de una manera nostálgica, con suficiente espacio para no tomarlos en serio, sino apreciarlos como parte de las idiosincrasias de una identidad colectiva en construcción.

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Barbacoa

Blanca García-Jenkins

Sofia left the building with a huge smile on her face. She was pleased with her daughter for signing up for a *clase de computación*. Her daughter was only 12, but Sofia had been told on multiple occasions that the child was bright. Although this was only her daughter's third class, she just knew that the child had accomplished so much. At night, when her daughter explained what she had done in class, Sofia felt very proud. She just knew the information was worthy of sharing with anyone who would allow her to do so. The class was only once a week, but Sofia was certain that her daughter would catch up fast and be among the most advanced students in no time.

The child felt the pressure of her mother's interrogations after each class, on the bus ride back home and worked hard to contain her tears. She wished they were not out of the house so late because this made her hungry. She could not share with her mother the embarrassment she felt the first day of class and how much she hated being there. She remembered that she sat in front of the computer desk quietly without understanding what was happening. The class advanced, but she just stared at the computer screen for a long time. Children and adults alike were too busy, and no one noticed that she was struggling.

When the teacher asked the pupils to perform a set of commands, her fingers would not obey her. The mouse was foreign to her hand, and the letters eluded her when she needed them. Should she raise her hand and ask for help? Could the teacher not realize that she was not following her instructions? Was she invisible? She could feel the shame and anger building up inside of her. What was she to do? She wished she were at home with her siblings playing and eating dinner together. She felt especially sick when the same teacher who had ignored her for the entire class wished her a good night in front of her mother at the end of the session and asked her to continue practicing at home the new set of commands that they had learned in class.

The child expressed her desire to quit the class, but Sofia would not hear of it. In her heart, Sofia knew the problem: The class was catering to the slow learners, and her child was getting bored. She was also certain that the child was ungrateful, but she attributed this to her young age. *Papá* was gone until late, clocking in more hours so they could afford the class, but they were certain the child needed a chance to succeed in life. Sofia tried to cheer up the child by telling her how proud she was of her and how one day she would appreciate the class.

The child felt that her family was being robbed. How could they pay such an amount of money for a class like this? Oh, how she dreamed of all of the things that she could do with that money. On a providential day, the money was in her pocket, and she was responsible for delivering the fee to the school. In the middle of the class, growls interrupted her thoughts. Her stomach never failed to inform her when her meager lunch was gone. In a split second, she chose to solve two problems at once.

The child got up from her seat with a smile on her face and walked out of the class. Her feet led her to the *mercado*. She headed straight to her favorite *barbacoa* stand and ordered three *tacos* and a big bowl of *consomé*. She felt wicked for using the school money to pay for the food, but that feeling vanished with the indescribable aroma of the *barbacoa* sitting in front of her. The future punishment was unavoidable, but being liberated from a useless class and from hunger was well worth it.

Southwest Urbanism: the Evolution of Mexican Urban Landscapes in the American Southwest

Moises Gonzales

Abstract:

This paper establishes a framework for understanding the urban evolution of cities in the Southwest from early Spanish settlement to contemporary major urban centers. The term Southwest Urbanism is used to explicate the physical urban condition and the evolution of cities in the arid Southwest. These cities are located in the land area ceded to the United States after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War in 1848. This paper explains the forces of urban landscape morphology that have shaped these cities from the Spanish colonial design strategies that organized settlement patterns to the contemporary role of Latino immigration in revitalizing neighborhoods. Southwest Urbanism is the evolution of the built environment in the Southwestern U.S. This concept broadens the discourse and critique of Mexican-American cities and, more importantly, provides urban policymakers with a deeper understanding of their role in urban intervention.

Introduction

The cities of the Southwest are located in the land area ceded to the United States after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War in 1848. They have evolved into major population centers while containing the material memory of early settlement patterns despite erasure of the cultural landscape through contested spatial territory. Nina Veregge explains the urban context of the American Southwest as those cultural areas:

...defined by the overlapping territories of three groups of people: American Indians, Hispano Americans, and Anglo Americans. While patterns of political and cultural hegemony have been sequential in nature—one power replacing another—settlement form is by nature cumulative, incorporating in patterns of form and structure the complex history of interaction.¹

The urban evolution of cities in the Southwest can be studied through the morphology and evolution of the cultural landscape over time. Urban morphology analysis assists in the comprehension of factors, both cultural and physical, that transforms the cultural landscape and describes changes in urban form.² This paper addresses the contemporary condition of cities from the processes of colonization, adaptation, resistance and geospatial contestation in the following distinct phases: 1) the Spanish colonial urban design strategies that shaped early settlement patterns of the Southwest, 2) the urban landscape succession and community resistance to American occupation of the late nineteenth century, 3) the World War II boom and the shaping of urban barrios, 4) the Chicano movement and the manifestation of nationhood and cultural monuments and 5) Latino immigration in revitalizing neighborhoods in the Latino cities of the Southwest.

Southwest Urbanism: A Theoretical Framework

The term Southwest Urbanism is theoretical framework which seeks to retrieve the urbanism of the past through critical understanding of the built environment, and inserting vibrant urbanism of the past into the present city. As a theoretical concept, Southwest Urbanism focuses on the regional vernacular urban form that emerges from the

1. Veregge, "Transformations of Spanish Urban Landscapes," *Journal of the Southwest*, 373.

2. Gonzales, Moises, José A. Rivera, J. Jarrett García, and Sam Markwell, "Qualitative and Visualization Methodologies for Modeling Social-Ecological Dimensions of Regional Water Planning on the Rio Chama," *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education*.

amalgamation of the Mexican-Chicano urban landscapes that exists simultaneously within the construct of the contemporary American city. In his book, *The Nine Nations of America*, Joel Garreau argues that we should forget political almanac depictions of North America because the continent really consists of nine distinct nations based on a distinctive web of power and influence.³ One of Garreau's distinctive nations is a geographic area he names Mexamerica that places the major cities in the present day Southwest and as connected to the cultural fabric of Mexico.⁴ Cities such as Santa Fe, Albuquerque, El Paso, San Antonio, Tucson, San Diego and Los Angeles are cities that endured the rule of Spanish colonization. Therefore, the idea of Mexamerica as geographic terrain is helpful in understanding the unique conditions of these major cities on the U.S. side of the border as well as the forces and factors that shaped their spatial organization.

Spanish Colonial Urban Design Strategies that Shaped Cities of the Southwest

The Spanish conquest of Northern Mexico began with a network of roads linking various regions on New Spain with a main inland road known as “el camino real,” stretched from Mexico City to present day New Mexico. The Camino Real would serve as the transportation infrastructure for establishing principal settlements such as San Miguel de Allende, Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Guadalupe del Paso and Santa Fe.⁵ In 1610, La Villa de Santa Fe was established as the capital of the New Mexico by Governor Don Pedro de Peralta⁶ and would become the first colonial city in the Southwest. Over the next 200 years, other spurs of the Camino Real would support the establishment of mission settlements of California, Arizona and Texas. El Paso del Norte was the next settlement to be established in the year 1659, followed by Tuscon

3. Garreau, *The Nine Nations of America*.

4. Ibid.

5. National Park Service, *El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro National Historic Trail*.

6. National Park Service, *National Historic Trail Feasibility Study Environmental Assessment*.

in 1700, Albuquerque in 1706, San Antonio in 1718 and Los Angeles (Nuestra Señora de la Reina de Los Angeles) in 1781.

The key to understanding present day cities in the Southwest is to comprehend the Spanish colonial urban design strategies that set the context of cultural urban space. As early as the sixteenth century, Mexico City dictated the land use, design standards and urban design criteria for all cities since during the Spanish colonial period as well as the Mexican period.⁷ A legal code established by the Spanish crown during the seventeenth century, known as “*la replicacion de los reynos de las indias*” (law of the Indies), was a compilation of laws covering colonial governance, public life as well as town planning.⁸ According to the laws, a plaza should be the center of the town site and should be square or rectangular. If rectangular, the length should be one-and-a-half times the width. The plaza should be proportional to the population and, at a minimum, be 200 by 300 feet. The buildings around the edge are to have *portales* (arcades), and at the corners, the *portales* should stop so that sidewalks of the eight other streets can be aligned with the plaza. In cold climates, the towns should have wide streets; in hot climates, narrow streets. Streets should run from the plaza in a manner to allow for substantial growth without adverse effect on appearance, defense or comfort.⁹ As settlements grew, streets and blocks were platted orthogonal and parallel to the principal streets framing the central plaza (Figure 1). This small block plaza square becomes the key urban feature in understanding the origin of urban form in the Southwest.

Just as important to the physical design and arrangement of the town plaza and organization of the settlement was the spatial location of the town center in relationship to the natural systems in a dry-arid landscape. Embedded in the laws of the Indies was the idea of agricultural self-sustainability of towns, therefore, the placement and development of agricultural infrastructure was the key to survival of a settlement. For example, in 1706 Governor Francisco Cuervo y Valdez of New Mexico,

7. Herzog, Lawrence A, *From Aztec to High Tech*.

8. Simmons, Marc, *Albuquerque*.

9. Veregge, 53.

in correspondence to the viceroy in Mexico City, stated that he founded the villa along the banks of the Rio Grande River in a good place for settlement for land, water, pasture and firewood.¹⁰ In addition to the layout and planning of the settlement, the laws prescribed the construction of the “*acequia*” irrigation system, the allotment of individual farmlands and regulation of the “*ejido*,” which were the communal wood gathering, hunting and grazing land of the settlement.¹¹ Spanish law set aside a pueblo league for each pueblo settlement that measured 5,000 *varas* in each cardinal direction as the settlement exterior boundary¹² (Figure 2). Today, engraved into the present day city form in the region, from Los Angeles to San Antonio, is the juxtaposition of the core plaza, the river and the ruins of the eighteenth-century *acequia* system.

The urban landscape organization dictated by the “laws of the Indies” during the founding of all the major urban centers in the Southwest become a key urban form element of all cities in the Southwest. The basis of understanding the arrangement of landform, neighborhoods and districts in the modern city has evolved from the integration of the historic form of the city. The occupation of Northern Mexico by the U.S. in 1848 led to the fragmentation of the Mexican landscape, which would lead to the next period of morphology and clash of cultures.

Urban Landscape Succession and Community Resistance to American Occupation

In 1848, the urban landscape succession of Mexican town centers in Northern Mexico was driven by the occupation of 51 percent of Mexico’s territory at the end of the Mexican-American war. The idea that Mexicans are immigrants is a misconception because even at the time of succession, 115,000 Mexicans in the Southwest became citizens of the U.S.¹³ and often is a misrepresentation of Mexican identity. Before

10. Simmons.

11. Gonzales, et al.

12. Ebright, Malcolm, *Land Grants and Lawsuits*.

13. Gomez, Laura E., *Manifest Destinies*.

American occupation, new New Mexico supported more town centers with two-thirds of the Mexican population ceded to the U.S. living there.¹⁴ However, by 1849, the Gold Rush to California caused a population explosion to reach 200,000 people in which only 13,000 were Mexicans.¹⁵ In 1850, California became the thirty-first state to be admitted into the Union whereas New Mexico would eventually be broken up to create the states of Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. Embedded in the transformation of political power, American migration into the region instigates cultural confrontation in urban space between Mexicans and Americans and then becomes the second factor of spatial manifestation in the southwestern city.

In the 1850s, the U.S. Congress passed two laws to establish a process of adjudication of lands owned to Mexican towns and individuals to recognize the property rights of Mexicans under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The first law was the California Land Act of 1851, which was specific to California¹⁶ and the second was the Survey General of New Mexico in 1854.¹⁷ Overall, Mexicans would fare poorly in adjudicating their land claims before these legal entities, and in many cases, American land speculators acquired a vast area of common grazing lands. A majority of Mexican towns lost vast areas of communal territory, and many would continue to fight to protect land holdings in the region until 1904 when the United States Court of Private Land Claims concluded adjudication of Mexican land rights.¹⁸ The eighteenth century established the cultural landscape of the cities in the Southwest, and the late nineteenth century established fixed spatial organization through the process of contested terrain due to American occupation of territory.

The American Occupation during the late nineteenth century established the spatial organization of communities and neighborhood,

14. Ibid.

15. Acuña, Rodolfo, *Occupied American*.

16. Ibid, 141.

17. Ebright, 37.

18. Ibid.

which was triggered by the preservation of a land base at the onslaught of an American land grab. In this period, the boundaries of Mexican communities were defended while Americans attempted to acquire land holdings for the development of the railroad. The initial contest of preserving territory is best exemplified in the preservation of the pueblo league land grants in both Los Angeles and Albuquerque. In Los Angeles, Mexicans were able to secure title to the pueblo land grant within the core of the pueblo until the 1890s. In and around the plaza, Mexicans would develop their own institutions, social organization, newspapers and cultural life and maintain Mexican customs.¹⁹ By the early 1900s, the development of the railroad along the Los Angeles River, as well as the development of downtown Los Angeles southeast began to demarcate Anglo and Mexican terrain to the north and east of the original pueblo league (Figure 3a).

The Pueblo League of Albuquerque was confirmed as a pueblo land grant by an act of congress on July 9, 1901.²⁰ Despite the grant being tied up in court, by 1880, the development of the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad would be constructed in the southeast quadrant of the Albuquerque grant, and the development of a town for Anglos called New Albuquerque would emerge (Figure 3b). From this point in time forward, two Albuquerques would manifest. The Mexican city would evolve and maintain spatial geography to the western portion of the Pueblo Grant whereas the Euro-American city would grow from New Albuquerque eastward along a Jeffersonian grid. Mexicans in Old Albuquerque would maintain an *acequia*-based landscape and vernacular urban form for decades to come while Mexicans in Los Angeles would resist erasure of its cultural landscape (Figure 4).

World War II Boom in MexAmerica: Urbanization and Organization of Barrio Space

World War II brought significant growth to the Southwest region through the explosion of jobs created around the development

19. City of Los Angeles, *El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument*.

20. Bowden, J.J., *Private Land Claims of the Southwest*.

of the military complex. The development of military bases, nuclear research facilities and defense-related manufacturing generated mass migration from within the U.S. to urban centers. Mark Simmons states, “The population explosion that began as a minor disturbance in the late 1940s and grew astonishing dimensions during ensuing decades created a new and different Albuquerque.”²¹ The Mexican population in California from 1940 to 1960 grew from 400,000 to 1.4 million.²² Manufacturing employment in Albuquerque grew from 9,000 to 20,800 jobs during the 1950s, transforming a small agricultural community into the industrial Detroit of the Southern Rockies. The migration of Euro-Americans coupled with native Chicano migration and immigration of Mexican workers instigated the third period of urban morphology and territory in Mexamerica. The World War II era and the militarization of the Southwest would expand the two spatial territories of these cities, the Mexican Territory and the American Territory. The Mexican territory in the city would be further refined and organized into distinct barrios and neighborhoods while collectively expressing a terrain of resistance.

The Mexican territory in the city during WWII was expanded out of the core territories of the late nineteenth century, however, the geography would become more urban and compact, and barrios would become more distinct. In juxtaposition, the American spatial territory in the city would derive from the new downtowns and would grow in territory in an opposite direction. In the case of Los Angeles, the American territory would expand west and south of the plaza core. In San Antonio, Americans developed to the east and north. In Albuquerque, Anglo population expanded eastward. Analysis of aerial imagery for 1935 of the pre-WWII urban footprint of Albuquerque in comparison to the aerial image of 1970 reveals that the Mexican territory was preserved to the pre-occupation flood plane of the Rio Grande, and the American Territory expanded out of the core of New Town Albuquerque (Figure 5). The process of rapid urbanization during this period led to a further refinement of Mexican urban space in which several of the seven characteristics of a city were created by organization of density, urban

21. Simmons, 370.

22. Acuña, 313.

clusters of barrios and the physical circumscription of territory, as Spiro Kostof believes, ‘to who belong in the urban order from those who do not.’²³

The specialization and branding of specific communities in the post-WWII Mexican urban territory was organized by several factors, such as place of origin, specialization in a similar occupation or community distinction developed by social order (Figure 6). For example, a portion of Barrio Logan in San Diego emerged from the migration of northern New Mexicans to work in ship building ports. Or in the case of Los Angeles, the subculture *pachuco* urban gang culture became a major factor in defining barrio boundaries. The *pachuco* gang culture grew out of social affiliations that organized community identity. The White Fence Gang of Boyle Heights emerged from a skilled labor community of workers in the brickyards, railroads and manufacturing industry.²⁴ The Marravilla Gang of East Los Angeles to this day maintains distinct boundaries that organize district-level social space and specialization in the existing urban fabric of Los Angeles. Cities during this time still, however, lacked the cultural identity and landmarks crucial in realizing urbanism. The Chicano movement of the 1960s, however, would change that.

Chicano Movement and Manifestation of Nationhood and Cultural Monuments

The Chicano Movement of the late 1960s is a key factor in providing urban identity, culture and the articulation of monument in the urban landscape. In 1969, three thousand Chicano youth activists gathered in Denver, Colorado, for the Chicano Liberation Youth Conference and declared about their identity, “We are a nation. We are a union of free pueblos. We are Aztlán.”²⁵ The term Aztlán in the Nahuatl Aztec language means “the lands to the north,” which the Chicano

23. Kostof.

24. Acuña, 268.

25. “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” in *An Anthology of Mexican American Literature*.

Movement interpreted as the Southwestern U.S. The Chicano Movement was profound in impacting identity, politics, social justice and public art. The influence of Chicano art in civic space would be one of the most prolific contributions to the built environment of the Southwest. In the eyes of the Chicano Movement, art represented the struggles of the community as affirmed identity against American occupation. “Chicano Art is a newborn baby with Ancient Indian Art as a Mother, Spanish Colonial Art as a father and Modern Mexican art as a midwife...art of the Chicano movement serves as a shield to preserve and protect our cultural values that form the mechanical shark of this society, that has been chewing and spitting our beautiful language, music, literature, and art for over a hundred years.”²⁶ The urban mural art projects of the 70s, as Kostof would say, “give the city scale, and the citizenry landmarks of a common identity.”²⁷ The classic example of such intervention of public space is the artist invasion of Centro Cultural de La Raza as “Chicano park” under the Coronado Bridge viaduct, which now is known for its splendid display of murals.²⁸

Immigration, Revitalization and Adaptation of the Latino City of the Southwest

A contemporary urbanistic strategy in the American Southwest that is re-shaping cities is the impact of recent Latino immigration and the re-adaption of urban space of the “new Latino city,” according to James Rojas, “Latino urbanism”—a shorthand notion that encompasses adaptive strategies, behavioral idiosyncrasies, and informal design elements which, he says, is “reshaping cities.”²⁹ This discourse is based on the idea that Latino immigrants are reshaping abandoned strip malls near downtown suburban neighborhoods and reshaping these spaces into vibrant markets and public space. In addition, immigrants are

26. Martinez, Manuel, “The Art of the Chicano Movement,” in *Aztlán: an Anthology of Mexican American Literature*.

27. Kostof, 40.

28. Herzog, 125.

29. Stephens, Josh, “Out of the Enclave: Latinos Adapt, and Adapt to, the American City,” *Planetizen*.

reworking the definition of single-family housing by creating mixed-use commercial amenities out of a garage, such as a beauty shop or a boutique clothing store, which is contrary to the formal zoning laws. For this reason, much of the narrative of contemporary “Latino urbanism” focuses on the informal planning strategies. This contemporary movement can be seen in the revitalization of commercial corridors in Mexican communities throughout the U.S. as new food cart stands, “*llanteras*” (rim shops) and “*carnicerias*” (meat markets) emerge throughout urban spaces.³⁰ However, there is a distinction in this phenomenon between the Southwest and other regions of the U.S. In the Southwest, it is the result of a process that re-adapts spaces in already majority Mexican communities (Figure 7). For example, Latino urbanism is not a process that is occurring in white American territories in cities of this region but, instead, within the historic fabric of WWII-era barrios set over the past two centuries of resistance.

Reconciliation: Urban Design Strategies and Possibilities

The nuance of “Latino urbanism” is really the next morphology in Mexican urban evolution in the reclaiming of public space and is part of a more complex historic system of urbanism as exemplified in this paper. For example, the Los Angeles River Revitalization is a massive urban landscape project that attempts to return the river to a more natural, pre-American function. The project intends to reconnect the East Los Angeles communities of Arroyo Seco and Barrio Boyle Heights to the historic plaza area as well as to other downtown neighborhoods³¹ (Figure 8). This is an ideological shift in the idea of the river being the community core as part of the cultural landscape in Mexican planning philosophy, as opposed to the river as threat and boundary of territory as in twentieth-century American town planning. A new era of reconciliation of two geographies into one city, such as with the Los

30. Millar, Norman, “Street Survival: The Plight of the Los Angeles Street Vendors,” in *Everyday Urbanism*.

31. City of Los Angeles, “Los Angeles River Restoration Revitalization Master Plan,” 24.

Angeles River project, will help lead to the next progression in urbanism in this region's cultural context.

Southwest Urbanism is the evolution of the built environment in the Southwestern U.S. and helps to provide for a broader discourse and critique of Mexican-American cities. More importantly, it provides urban designers with a deeper understanding of the role of urban intervention in the built environment. Southwest Urbanism is a methodological approach to understanding the evolution of the built and natural environment of cities in the Southwest. Unlike other regions in the U.S., the Southwest was born from urban design strategies and ideals generated from Mexico City as early as the sixteenth century with the founding of Santa Fe, New Mexico. Since the American occupation in 1848, the American planning values of the nineteenth and twentieth century have dominated the built environment of this region. However, the process of resistance by the Chicano community in reaction to American colonization has simultaneously countered the spatial organization in the Southwest, which impacted the spatial morphology. However, it is time now for the next phase of urbanism, which will be the reconciliation of contested urban spaces of two separate geographies into one integrated urbanism.

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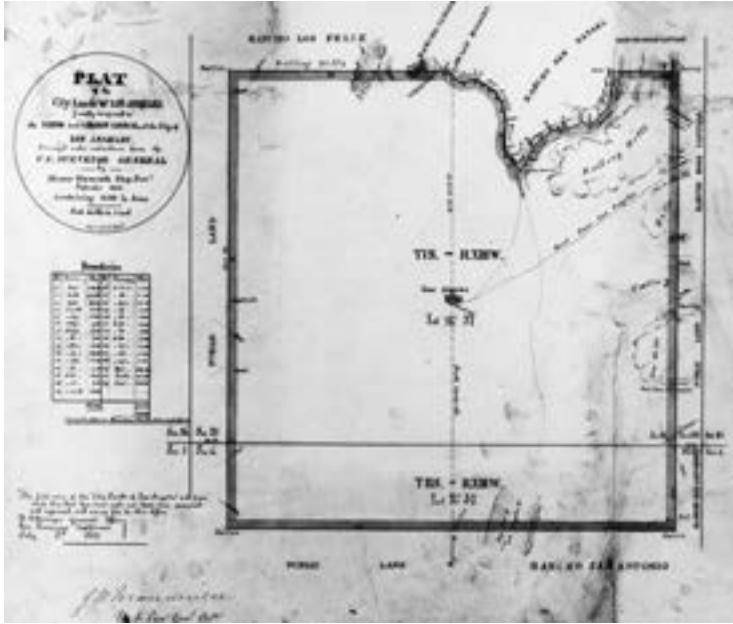
Figures

Figure 1 (image by the author)



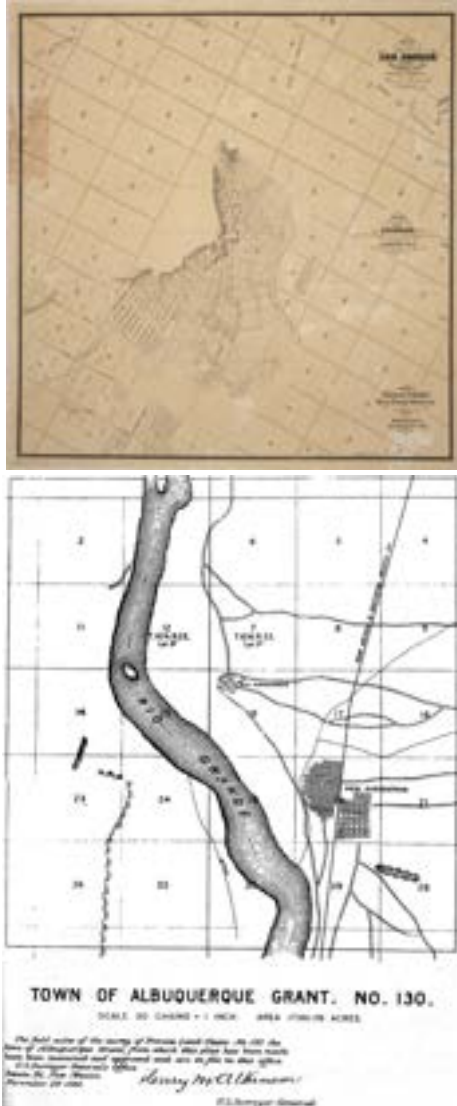
- a. Aerial view of Old Town Albuquerque
- b. Figure Block Patterns of Old Town Albuquerque
- c. Building Footprints of Old Town Albuquerque

Figure 2



Survey of Pueblo League of El Pueblo de Los Angeles in 1851
Source: Survey General of the United States

Figure 3a and 3b



- a. Block Platting Around Historic Los Angeles Plaza
- b. Survey of the Albuquerque Pueblo League in 1880 by the U.S. Survey General

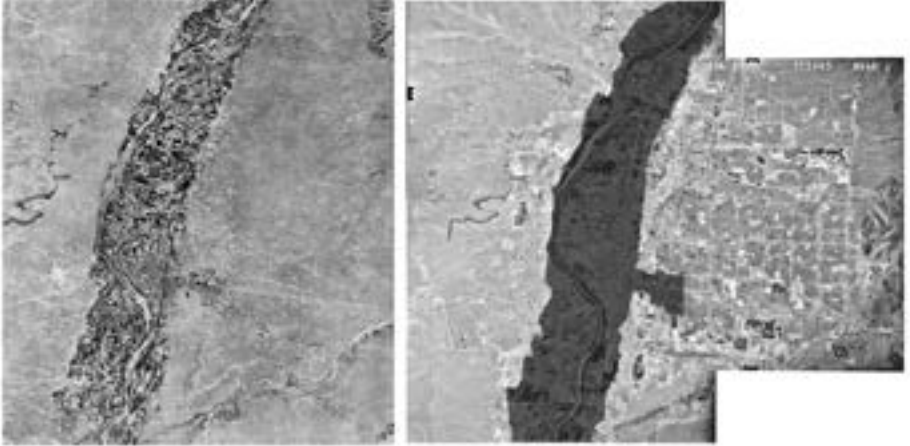
Figure 4



1849 Map of El Pueblo de Los Angeles

Source: LA Plaza Monument, City of Los Angeles

Figure 5



- a. Right, 1935 Aerial View of Albuquerque
- b. Left, 1968 WWII Aerial View of Albuquerque with 1935 Urban Footprint

(Aerial Imagery from Earth Data Analysis Center, UNM)

Figure 6



Photo of Railyard Locomotive Shop Circa 1940, Albuquerque New Mexico

Source: Center for Southwest Research Digital Archive, UNM

Figure 7 (Images generated by the author)



- a. New Urbanist Approach to Redevelopment along Brighton Street, Denver, Colorado
- b. Informal Approaches to Maintain Cultural Street Character on Brighton Street
- c. Proposal by Author for More Tactical Informal Approaches to Improving Public Space

Figure 8



Los Angeles River Revitalization Project, Proposed Trail Improvements
Source: City of Los Angeles River Project 2011

La Secretary

Luz María Gordillo

Abstract:

United States' immigration policies and practices affect a number of transnational communities. Their implementation and the militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border fragment those who migrate but also those who stay in their communities of origin. Mexican women who experience transnationalism at home have been neglected in academic production. *La Secretary* exemplifies some of the familial dislocations that women experience in their communities of origin. Despite the latest engendering of immigration studies by feminists from several disciplines, an analysis of "domestic transnationalism" lags behind. The global mobility of labor in the twenty-first century calls for an analysis of transnational economic and socio-political intersectionalities. Mexican women's "domestic" transnational experiences are conveyed through the point of view of a 15-year-old in *La Secretary*. Her voice emphasizes her family's transnational dislocation and the generational consequences that may result when women are affected by immigration processes.



Property of the Author Luz María Gordillo

I hear sobs and loud clicking noises. Faint whimpers and the fork pounding and poking at the tightly packed ice in the freezer of our miniature refrigerator wake me up.

--¿*Que pasa?* What time is it?

I open my eyes, and under the dusty flowered curtain separating our one-room apartment, I see my mother's worn out white pumps propped up as if she were about to pirouette; she's grabbing for a plastic bag on the top shelf. She places the ice in the bag. Like a wounded

hummingbird, she tends to her injuries while she avoids flinching with pain. I've seen her do it many times.

--¡*Son Chingaderas!* We need a new refrigerator.

She kicks the fridge.

--Do it again.

--Who cares? The thing doesn't work anyways.

--And good luck trying to get ice cubes.

Another john has beaten her. A tear wells up, my chest tightens and I feel so lightheaded, I want to vomit. So what if we have a not-so-silent understanding. We pretend she is a respectable Avon Lady. It hurts so much to see my mother try so hard. For as long as I can remember, she's been saving money for us to move away from the city.

The last time I saw my father, we lived in a small town near Querétaro called San Juan del Río. I was five. As he waved good-bye, he promised to buy me the new pink baby bean doll we had been looking for, as soon as he arrived in the United States.

--I promise you, my little princess, in *el Norte*, nothing is oversold.

But we never heard from him, and soon after, my mother and I moved to Mexico City. And just like everyone in the working class neighborhood where we lived, she entered an endless hunt for different jobs. After ten years, bumpy curves bulge where once a perfect figure stood. She looks overwhelmingly tired. Struggling along in her heels and slouching forward, she collapses on the sofa, breathing heavily and exhaling softly the dissonance of despair and hope.

There was something exciting about the different and usually temporary jobs that my mom worked, like selling Avon products door to door. I remember one day going into her "*estuche de productos*" Avon and opening and smelling tiny bottles of perfumes that she gave away as samples, white containers with watermelon- and peach-scented hand moisturizers, compacts with sparkly eye shadows and color-matching

lipsticks.

Es solo una prueba, she would say while she poured a light drop of perfume on the tip of her index finger and delicately applied it to the back of both my ears, ending with a soft blow that gave me goose bumps.

In the evenings, my mother would pause before she prepared her Avon tote carrying cosmetic products to sell beauty, and one of her tight dresses for her oversold body to fit into. I remember, in particular, the tight cobalt blue cotton dress with large ruffles running down from the edge of the cleavage and ending in an uneven hem that was longer in the back than in the front. Another was made of stretchy spandex material in metallic red with black lace contouring the neckline and a shiny multi-colored sequined belt that wrapped tightly around her waistline. In front of the mirror my mother models the red uniform and says:

--Look, *mija*, thin as a rake.

She grabs my arms, pulls me against her body for a long time and plants a very wet kiss on my forehead.

--Get out!

--Ewww, *mami*. Knock it off.

After work, while she undresses, the red dress leaves shiny flecks gilding the old moldy gray tile near the one and only small window with a view of a brick wall. I spent mornings sewing the sequins one by one so that she wouldn't notice the dress' gradual decay.

Before my mother began to sell her body full-time and Avon products part-time, she worked for the Indonesian Embassy as a secretary. I'll never know how she got the job, but on one occasion and before her round-faced chubby boss fired his "favorite" secretary, she helped organize a fashion show featuring Indonesian regional dresses for a group of diplomats visiting the city.

--Wow. ¡*Que linda se ve mi mami!*

When I arrived through the back door of the embassy, my mom was draped in delicate materials. She looked stunning among rivers of

colored silk, intricate textiles.

My mom had gone to the *Academy for Secretaries Le Frank*, which was two more years of secretarial training after seventh grade. She had always dreamed of becoming a secretary, but by the time she had applied for work as a secretary, her secretarial career had been long forgotten and buried along with her skills.

We fantasized about adorning our apartment with fancy furniture, imagined it bigger and brighter. We decorated it with pictures of fashion magazines on the wall, a plastic plant that sat by the rusty stove, a curtain hanging in the center. Sometimes, sitting together on our smelly second-hand pull-out sofa, the couch itself seemed to sigh.

--*Cierra los ojos.*

I hear the ice and smell her perfume.

--Close your eyes.

But I don't. Instead, I follow her white scraped heels under the curtain coming toward me. Then when she's very near me, I shut my eyes, trapping my tears between my eyelashes. I feel her hand gentle on my hair.

I let my mother's faint sobs and the clicking from the ice pack rubbing against her skin slowly lull me back to sleep for a little while. I drift off and dream about attending the academy for *secretarias bilingüe ejecutivas*. *Mañana*, I will defrost the freezer and make ice cubes. I will make a beaded curtain to replace the wrinkled and graying one. I saw a picture of the curtain in a magazine. The room feels larger already.

Testimonio, Activism and Chicana/o-* **Latina/o Historiography: Narrativizing Bert Corona's Memories*

David Manuel Hernández

Abstract:

This essay addresses the contributions and limitations of Bert Corona's autobiographical narrative, *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona*, produced by Mario T. García. The essay assesses García and Corona's collaborative oral history project as part of the largely Latin American and United States Latina genre of *testimonio*. Corona's communal narrative is an interstitial contribution to this genre—a break from male hagiographies found in Chicana/o historiography but also limited by its uninterrogated gendered themes and the traditional periodization of García's earlier scholarship. The essay explores the text's value in relating Corona's complex development as an activist, historical observer and intellectual. Finally, the essay addresses Corona's narrative as a generative complement to other Chicana/o histories utilizing both traditional and oral history methodologies. Corona's collectively drawn genealogy is indicative of the growth and new horizon for the use of *testimonio* in relating submerged histories.

Introduction

An unprecedented film released in 2014 marked the birthday of labor leader, César Chávez. Produced and directed by Mexican actor, Diego Luna, *César Chávez* retells a triumphant segment in Chávez's life and his rise to fame as the leader of the United Farm Workers (UFW). Once titled "César Chávez: An American Hero"¹ the film is in the tradition of popular hagiographic "biopics" illustrating historical figures often marginal outside of the academy. In this representational vacuum, it often does not take long for critique to follow high expectations. *César Chávez* received concentrated criticism, especially from academics, for depicting the collective farmworkers' struggle as a singular one, driven by a charismatic leader. Notably, central historical figures like UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta; Chávez's wife Helen Chávez; and Filipino labor leaders, Larry Itliong and Philip Vera Cruz, are marginal in the film, either in support roles or unnamed.

The film is a contemporary reflection of a dominant framing device—the male hero story—that is prevalent in early generations of Chicana/o Studies scholarship. Mario T. García's *Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona* seeks to intervene in this familiar historical formation in both subject and form. García chooses Humberto "Bert" Corona (1918-2001) and the autobiographical genre of *testimonio* to relate sixty years of collective struggles for Chicana/o and Latina/o civil rights in the United States. The *testimonio* takes many forms but is usually a first person oral or written narrative, often mediated by—or, "as told to"—an interviewer/researcher. Bert Corona, as narrative subject, participated in a plethora of labor, civil and immigrants' rights struggles at critical junctures in twentieth century Chicana/o-Latina/o history. One colleague once called Corona, humorously, the "Forrest Gump of Chicana/o history," and noted his almost apparitional presence at the negotiating table, founding organizational meetings or in photographs at critical historical moments decade after decade, from the 1930s through the 1990s. Political scientist Alfonso Gonzales,

1. Heller, "Hunger Artist: How Cesar Chavez Disserved his Dream," *The New Yorker*, 74.

reflecting on contemporary struggles for immigrants' rights, recently noted Corona's generative role as part of the "nuclei of leadership" of the 1960s and 1970s Latina/o social movements, identifying Corona as a "a true organic intellectual in his own right."² Indefatigable, Corona has few parallels—Dolores Huerta would be one—given his longevity and the cumulative weight of his contributions to Chicana/o-Latina/o activism. As such, he is a fruitful subject for a testimonial account of his life, activism and observations of Chicana/o-Latina/o history.

Focusing wholly on the life of Corona, however, also runs the risk of producing, once again, a male-centered hagiography, perhaps lionizing Corona along with other Chicano male heroes, most notably the four male pillars of traditional Chicano scholarship—César Chávez, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, José Angel Gutiérrez and Reies López Tijerina—all who have numerous books (and now films) dedicated to their lives, political thought and organizations. García's use of the *testimonio* form—often gendered and politicized as a feminist genre—serves to undercut the male-centered orientation of dominant portrayals of Chicana/o history through its collective rendering of Latina/o civil rights activism. At the same time, it underscores these male-dominated accounts in the traditional organization of the historical narrative. In short, García's interlocution of Corona's oral history contributes to the *testimonio* genre but is also limited by its close correlation with early Chicana/o historiography.

Corona's reflections on twentieth century Chicana/o-Latina/o activism are stories of solidarity, not solitude. According to Dolores Delgado Bernal, Rebeca Burciaga and Judith Flores Carmona, "Through *testimonios* we are invited to be participants."³ Corona's *testimonio* is explicitly concerned with shared justice and locates the individual voice in a collective context, contributing to the historical archive of the Latina/o experiences in the U.S. Unlike the film *César Chávez*, Corona's

2. Gonzales, *Reform Without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State*, 53.

3. Bernal, Burciaga, and Carmona, "Chicana/Latina Testimonios: Mapping the Methodological, Pedagogical, and Political," *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 368.

family members, co-workers, fellow negotiators and working class peer activists move from the margins to the center in this *testimonio*.

Given today's highly complex, intertwined and mutually constitutive social challenges—war, indigenous rights, labor activism, immigrants' rights, gay and lesbian social movements, to name a few—Corona's unique and persistent leadership role in a variety of political contexts and his atypical ideological purviews are instructive for persons interested in social movement history, Chicana/o-Latina/o experiences and immigrant organizing. "The *testimonio* is intentional and political," suggests Kathryn Blackmer Reyes and Julia Curry Rodríguez.⁴ Corona's *testimonio* reflects this intentionality, relating how community activists—himself, peers and adversaries—develop and mature through struggle, especially how they switch gears, make personal or organizational adjustments and reverse directions within social movements, all the while maintaining focus on their ultimate goal of social justice. Although Corona's intimate recollections and disclosures of social movement history are in tension with García's construction of that history, constraining the narrative, Corona's memories nonetheless elicit a variety of voices and collective empowerment.

Textual Formation

Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona is an oral history project based on almost sixty hours of testimony, or several hundred pages of transcription, accumulated by historian García over the course of four years.⁵ García, a proponent of oral histories that document the experiences of marginalized people, writes, "Oral history has been particularly important because Mexican-Americans and other racial minorities in the United States have generally been poor, working people who historically have not produced a vast array of documents or other written matter."⁶ As well, Chicana/o-Latina/o

4. Reyes and Rodríguez, "Testimonio: Origins, Terms, and Resources," *Equity and Excellence in Education*, 525.

5. García, *Memories of Chicano History*, 22.

6. *Ibid.*, 20.

Studies places a premium on communal voices and organic leaders, developing its archive through this tradition of scholarship. According to García, “This is not a biography. Rather it is an oral history that in form and content is closer to a Latin American *testimonio*, involving the collective authorship of scholar and activist.”⁷ García employs dialogic and reciprocal techniques that are founded on his relationship with and similarities to Corona. García writes, “As children of the Mexican Revolution, as products of border life, and as students of history, Bert Corona and I have been drawn together.”⁸ The project is indebted to Corona’s rich memory and attention to detail. Historian Rodolfo Acuña states, “Corona’s incredible memory records almost every detail of Chicano history from that time to the present.”⁹

García’s production of Corona’s *testimonio* serves moderately as a counter-masculinist history and joins a larger and influential body of feminist contributions theorizing the *testimonio* form. Collections such as *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001), Emma Pérez’s *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History* or Maylei Blackwell’s *¡Chicana Power!: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* have reshaped the field of Chicana/o-Latina/o history, defying and correcting static historical distortions and bridging communal histories with academic historiography. In addition, a recent issue of the journal, *Equity and Excellence in Education*, explores *testimonios* as a critical pedagogy—teaching content that has been silenced or ignored, eliciting empowering voices and experiences of students and instructors and imparting “a sense of political urgency to address educational inequities.”¹⁰

This wide critical engagement with oral histories and the *testimonio* genre, in particular those generated by U.S. Latina scholars, has centered marginalized histories and experiences through listening, re-telling and writing these into the historical record. Such projects

7. Ibid, 341.

8. Ibid, 24.

9. Acuña, “Book Review,” *Choice*, 1492.

10. Bernal, et al., “Chicana/Latina Testimonios,” 363.

have uncovered the complexity and multiplicity of Chicana/o-Latina/o experiences previously ignored in gendered constructions of history usually focused on traditionally male-dominated organizations and forms of organizing or political activity. As well, these contributions take readers beyond the more well-known and iconic Latin American examples, such as the widely read, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian Woman in Guatemala*, produced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in 1987. Since, then, feminist historians including Antonia Castañeda, Miroslava Chávez-García, Dionne Espinosa, Deena González, Yolanda Broyles González, Cynthia Orozco and Emma Pérez along with other scholars such as Norma Alarcón, Gloria Anzaldúa, Dolores Delgado Bernal, Elena Gutiérrez and Elizabeth “Betita” Martínez who have written counter to the shelf full of male-centered histories. They have looked far beyond the “Mount Rushmore” faces of Chávez, González, Gutiérrez and Tijerina to build a broader and more inclusive version of Chicana/o-Latina/o Studies. Further, recent histories of the Chicano Movement, such as Ernesto Chávez’s “*¡Mi Raza Primero!*”: *Nationalism, Identity, and Insurgency in the Chicano Movement in Los Angeles, 1966-1978* or Maylei Blackwell’s *¡Chicana Power!*, explicitly critique the male-centered heroism that was the product and mission of much early historiography. As Chávez argues plainly, “Chicano nationalism... privileged males and marginalized females.”¹¹ Although Corona does not offer an explicit gendered critique of sexism embedded within Chicano nationalism, he does offer a nuanced and pragmatic notion of nationalism that is more about collective agency and egalitarianism, rather than superiority of male leadership. Thus, Corona’s narrative sits among U.S. Latina *testimonios* in an interstitial position. It is not a feminist text but it is a gendered one, complicating the often gendered contest over constructing the Chicana and Chicano historical archive and also reinforcing some of its early structures.

The root of Corona and García’s textual collaboration dates back to the early 1970s. Their close relationship is thus a central aspect of the project, contributing to García’s selection of the collaborative *testimonio* form instead of biography. *Testimonio* was preferred, not only

11. Chávez, “*¡Mi Raza Primero!*” 5

because of Corona's expansive public history but, also, because the genre removes some of the layers of editorial intrusion by the oral historian, permitting Corona to speak in his own voice, or give testimony. In this way, "*Testimonio* transcends descriptive discourse to one that is more performative."¹² As such, *Memories of Chicano History* is neither autobiography nor biography. It remains, however, a transcription in the first person, disclosing autobiographical content.

In the introduction, García informs the reader about the extent of his editorial incursions—occasionally adding or deleting words to enhance his view of logic and readability and providing footnotes. Acuña views this mode of editing as nonintrusive, stating, "García does not over-edit and lets Corona speak."¹³ By presenting the *testimonio* as an explicitly dialectical narrative, *Memories of Chicano History* works against traditional historiography that presents a linear narrative as "fact" or "truth." As well, breaking from the biographical form, García avoids an aggrandizing construction of Corona's life. García's mode of editing, however, does reintroduce his already established framing of Chicana/o history, including well-defined generations or cohorts of Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Chicanas/os advancing through the twentieth century, as well as "prompting" about well-known events, institutions and persons found in traditional Chicana/o histories.

As a *testimonio*, the book discloses a "choir of voices," departing from traditional autobiography centered on the subject.¹⁴ Corona narrates circumstances in which collective agency and unity are central elements. As Reyes and Curry Rodríguez suggest, "The main feature of the testimonial text is the construction of a discourse of solidarity."¹⁵ As such, Corona recounts his life as part of the larger collective Latina/o struggle for social justice. García and Corona's collaboration reflects the pedagogical principles of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire—that literacy is a means to social justice—where political memories can be rearticulated

12. Bernal, et al., 364.

13. Acuña, 1492.

14. García, 348.

15. Reyes and Rodríguez, 526.

against dominant histories of colonialism from the grassroots upward. Such projects are vital in our current climate of crises, including war, government repression in the name of anti-terrorism, the criminalization of Latina/o youth and record-breaking deportations. Subscribing to James Clifford's notion that the collaborative strategy of *testimonio* suggests a "utopia of plural authorship,"¹⁶ García's project provides an avenue for disclosure without necessitating that Corona pen his own autobiography. This is especially important in the case of Corona, whose historical recollections might have remained unwritten.

It is important to mention that due to the collaborative technique, we also hear García's voice and his desire to provide oppositional histories that center Chicana/o-Latina/o agency in a well-worn periodic framework. Reflecting what Blackwell calls the "politics of periodization,"¹⁷ García's construction of the narrative timeline follows the historical framework he developed in his earlier revisionist scholarship. García writes:

Corona's narrative is intended to deconstruct American history both to reveal breaks in the traditional textual or mythological notion of American progress and justice for all and...include the presence, contributions, successes and failures of previously marginalized racial minorities such as Mexican Americans.¹⁸

This notion informs García's editorial intentions and ensures that the communal voice in the *testimonio* also speaks to these dual tasks. That is, it seeks to revise U.S. history directed at a broad readership but also challenges the textual nullification of Chicanos/as and Latinas/os "in the hope that our texts will help to empower our community."¹⁹ Positioned at the core of the narrative, Corona's memories retell a rich and largely

16. Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*, 51.

17. Blackwell, *¡Chicana Power! Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, 12.

18. García, 345.

19. Ibid.

unknown history of Latinas/os, encompassing events from the Mexican Revolution and continuing through today's struggle over immigration and undocumented Latina/o workers. This latter issue is represented by a discussion of California's Proposition 187 and other federal legislations targeting immigrants, which were contemporary events at the time of publication.

Narrativizing Individual and Collective Memories

Corona's *testimonio* recollects the commonalities, contradictions and overall heterogeneity of the Chicana/o-Latina/o experience. A border resident, he was born in El Paso, Texas, and lived in the well-known El Segundo barrio. His parents met and relocated to the border region as a result of the Mexican Revolution. The Corona family straddled the borderline and, like many border residents then and now, crossed it regularly to visit family and friends. Corona's disclosures about El Paso not only express the political heterogeneity of Latina/o families but, also, strongly suggest a unified economy and social web artificially blocked by the U.S.-Mexico border and the militarization of the region by immigration authorities. Demonstrating what Anzaldúa termed a "tolerance for ambiguity"²⁰ or what Alicia Schmidt Camacho calls a "migrant imaginary,"²¹ Corona's fused border experience informs the ease with which he accepts and reconciles his multiple selves—the Mexican and the U.S. citizen, the English and the Spanish speaking, and the non-Catholic, raised primarily by his mother and grandmother. In this sense, Corona parallels Anzaldúa's *new mestiza*—"she sustains contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else."²²

Attending public schools, Corona confronted his role as the "other" in relation to whites in Texas. The strong influence of his mother and grandmother positioned his "otherness" as an asset and a defining component in his life. According to Corona's recollections, the

20. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 79.

21. Camacho, *Migrant Imaginaries: Latino Cultural Politics in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*.

22. Anzaldúa, 79.

foundational influence of these two women was a formative element in his activism and worldview. For example, he grew up without shame of his Mexican self. Corona states, “I don’t recall the process of growing up Mexican in the United States...as a particularly alienating experience.”²³ More so, Corona states, “I saw myself belonging to a people who possessed a right to be in the Southwest.”²⁴ Corona’s seemingly undivided Chicano identity helped him raise his own children biculturally, as Mexican-Americans and Russian-Polish Jews, the ethnocultural background of wife Blanche Taft. “Consequently,” relates Corona, “I don’t think they [his children] ever faced the problem of culture clash, at least in regard to their Mexican backgrounds. They always felt at home with the idea that they were bicultural.”²⁵

Corona’s mother and grandmother were instrumental in developing his sense of activism. They are remembered in the *testimonio* as strong, educated and professional women—his mother was a teacher and his grandmother was a doctor—who deeply influenced his commitment to community. Corona acknowledges, “From both of them I received a sense of right and wrong and a sense of duty about helping others, especially those suffering injustices.”²⁶ Memories of his father, as recounted to Corona by his mother and grandmother, were a secondary influence on Corona’s sense of justice. Corona’s non-Catholic, liberal Protestant background was central to family life and especially influenced him in “the practice of social doctrine that [he] had never abandoned”²⁷ and later helped him more practically in organizing efforts in the various churches in Latina/o communities. His mother and grandmother taught Corona to interpret scriptures for himself and honed his skills in analysis and critical thinking. He, thus, learned to question authority and “official” U.S. histories. His grandmother used to say, relates Corona, “You have to understand that the United States

23. García, 53.

24. Ibid, 64.

25. Ibid, 194.

26. Ibid, 37.

27. Ibid, 42.

writes its history to its own convenience. It always has, and these people always will.”²⁸

Corona's biliteracy also helped ground him in the Latina/o community. Although his mother taught him English and Spanish, his family spoke Spanish at home and with family members. His mother and grandmother instilled pride in the language and its correct usage. Corona recounts, “They corrected our improper composition, improper spelling, or improper pronunciation.”²⁹ In fact, it was not until Corona moved to California that he confronted Mexicans who hid their ability to speak Spanish and denied their Mexican ancestry. Corona states, “When Mexicans in L.A. said they were proud to be Americans, they meant they were proud not to be Mexicans.”³⁰ As such, cultural pride, bilingualism, biliteracy, acceptance of his dual Mexican and U.S. identity and a social commitment to justice were introduced positively and without rupture in Corona's early lifetime. This grounded his identity and permitted a focus and commitment toward community activism.

Corona's disclosures demonstrate his pragmatic organizational strategies, developed through decades of community service, and his commitment to community control and grassroots leadership. With various organizations, Corona practiced “organizing around families” to reach Latina/o communities in the spaces where they congregated. Corona's narrative presents his identity—largely uninterrogated as a gendered identity—as a positive attribute in his life, yet malleable to changing circumstances. The privilege of this gendered position, especially in the mid-twentieth century, facilitates Corona's social mobility while his communal focus allows Corona to immerse himself in various Latina/o communities and social movements. Corona discloses anecdotes and recollections about well-known historical figures such as César Chávez and Fred Ross but, also, often overshadowed or erased Latina activists such as Dolores Huerta, Josefina Fierro, Luisa Moreno and Soledad “Chole” Alatorre. Respecting their pragmatism and

28. Ibid, 51.

29. Ibid, 53.

30. Ibid, 70.

grassroots sensitivity most of all, of labor organizer “Chole” Alatorre, Corona relates:

Chole has been a very successful organizer—possibly one of the best organizers that I have ever known. Her main strength has been this very personal contact with the rank and file, as opposed to union hierarchies.³¹

His focus on pragmatic activism illuminates his identity politics and can be found, for example, in his frustration with the nomenclature debates often part of Latina/o organizational development. Says Corona about a 1958 attempt to form a national political organization: “We failed to do so, largely—and foolishly—because we couldn’t agree on a name for the group. All this, of course, smacked of provincialism.”³² Exemplifying fluidity, evolution and non-dogmatic interest in terms of Latina/o nomenclature, Corona, who originally identified as Mexican, would adopt and later relinquish the “Mexican American” label in the late 1960s and embrace “Chicano,” which was popular with other activists, although he again believed it “foolish” for Mexican Americans or Chicanos/as to refuse or prescribe the use of this identity label.³³ What we learn from these assessments is that Corona had little patience for dogma, self-importance or developing an elite vanguard—sensitivities that would cause tension in the 1960s and 1970s maelstrom of activism—but, instead, he placed a premium on communal focus and collective action.

Corona’s pragmatic focus triggered at times mutual tension between his generation and younger Chicano Movement activists. Corona supported and participated with Chicana/o student activists in the 1960s and 1970s, yet was critical of some methods and dogmatic tendencies. He states, “There’s no question that there was a fundamental ideological difference between me and the young people on how you organize the community. It was less a political difference than a tactical

31. Ibid, 299.

32. Ibid, 197.

33. Ibid, 256.

one.”³⁴ Many more ideologically driven Chicanos/as were concerned about building a vanguard political movement whereas Corona prioritized serving an oppressed working class community and building leadership from that base. The focus on the core material needs of the base members of these organizations set Corona apart from the new generation of activists, eventually contributing to the dissolution of some organizations. Corona was also explicitly critical of Chicano nationalism and notions of the homeland Aztlán as organizing principles. While he accepted cultural pride as a critical vehicle for personal and communal empowerment, “as a political strategy,” says Corona, “I don’t think it’s a good one.”³⁵ Similarly, Corona expresses criticism of mainstream and politically moderate Latino organizations. Not only does he criticize the Southwest Council of La Raza (now the National Council of La Raza) as being an elitist top-down organization, he also states that its dependency on national funding “limited the effectiveness and autonomy of the group and steered it toward more of an establishment perspective.”³⁶ Despite these criticisms, according to Acuña, “In both the mainstream and radical sectors of the Chicano Movement, he had the uncanny ability to feel at home and be accepted by both groups.”³⁷

Unlike many classic Chicana/o narratives, Corona’s *testimonio* does not operate in relation to an internal struggle with identity. Rather, Corona’s focus is clearly social change and collective Latina/o civil rights. According to Lourdes Torres:

Identity politics has never meant bemoaning one’s individual circumstances, or ranking oppressions, or a politics of defensiveness around one’s issues. Rather, identity politics means a politics of activism, a politics which seeks to recognize, name, and destroy the system of domination which subjugates people of color.³⁸

34. Ibid, 311.

35. Ibid, 265.

36. Ibid, 229.

37. Acuña, 168.

38. Torres, “The Construction of the Self in U.S. Latina Autobiographies,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, 275.

Corona engages in precisely this type of identity politics through seven decades of activism, which define his life and shape U.S. history. In recounting his participation in social struggles, Corona diminishes his own importance as an individual actor, privileging instead communal efforts and accomplishments in the *testimonio* tradition. As García writes, “His life and work embody the changing character of the Mexican-American communities in the United States.”³⁹ As such, Corona’s narrative displays a flexible and alternative identity construction for Chicanos/as and Latinas/os. He is not burdened internally by self-degradation nor guided by an adherence to cultural nationalism as a response to the social and historical hegemony in the U.S. His identity is grounded in the struggle for social justice. As such, Corona’s political engagement, especially read alongside other Chicana/o-Latina/o scholarship about identity and social movements, clears a space for the formation of a more complex activist subjectivity, grounded in community effort and concern.

Narrativizing Chicana/o-Latina/o History

Corona’s long career as a social activist demonstrated his capacity to be a conduit between generations of political activists and organizations. Rooted in his upbringing and focus on communal service, Corona demonstrated flexibility, faith in community struggle and belief in social change, including personal change. His *testimonio* about these times bridges autobiography and historiography. Although *testimonio* can take many forms, from speeches, interviews and oral histories to spoken word, *corridos*, and twenty-first century social media examples, *Memories of Chicano History* takes the form of an accessible narration of history witnessed by the subject. His disclosures about his involvement in the Latina/o community’s continuous activism and labor organizing from the 1930s to the 1990s are an important complement to other historical accounts. The narrative centers Latina/o activism and resistance prior to the 1960s, providing continuity and context

39. García, 1.

to the more renowned Chicano Movement and removing it from the exceptionalist bubble of the 1960s and 1970s. Through his influence as a community leader and activist, Corona serves both as an agent for progressive change and as an example of how organizing can affect the lives of individuals and communities. García writes, “Corona exemplifies at a leadership level the importance of historical agency in the making of Chicano history.”⁴⁰

Because of the expansive nature of Corona’s community activism, it is impossible to more than briefly mention the significant events and insider accounts that his memories bring together. From adolescent resistance to discrimination in the El Paso schools, confrontations with police repression and opposition to segregation of public facilities in the Southwest, Corona’s early community activism created the agenda for a collective legacy of struggle for social justice. His involvement in labor unions, such as the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), honed his organizing skills, influenced his labor activism and impressed upon Corona the inherent rights of workers. His union activism, in particular, facilitated future community organizing across race, ethnic divisions among Latinas/os and critically, across immigration statuses. Corona’s engagement with electoral politics placed him on a national stage, where he managed the VIVA Johnson and Bobby Kennedy campaigns and met with President Johnson. His recollections bring to life the histories of pivotal Mexican American and Chicana/o organizations and their members. These include El Congreso Nacional del Pueblo de Habla Española, the Community Service Organization, the Asociación Nacional Mexico-Americana, the Mexican American Political Association, the VIVA Johnson and Bobby Kennedy efforts, the National Chicano Anti-War Moratorium and La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional. Complementing other Chicana/o histories, which summarize the activities of these organizations, Corona’s narrative weaves them together, indicating their organizational rise and fall, and how and why certain organizations blended into subsequent ones in response to shifting political winds.

40. Ibid, 12.

In the latter stage of his career, Corona served as director of La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, working to organize and empower undocumented workers. His struggles against anti-immigrant legislation and xenophobia at the end of the twentieth century drew from earlier struggles and foresaw immigration challenges still in existence today. In the 1950s, for example, Corona sought to build strong grassroots support for *bracero* laborers, at a time when most unions opposed the Mexican guest worker program. Corona's grasp of the larger labor horizon allowed him to articulate the contradictions of mass deportations of Mexican workers simultaneous to the importation of Mexican *braceros*. Drawing from early twentieth-century traditions of membership organizations, Corona founded La Hermandad and Centro de Acción Social Autónoma (or CASA) on the model of mutual aid societies, based on members' participation and service. Assessing his accomplishments in the immigration arena, Acuña writes:

The person most responsible for changing the anti-undocumented worker position was Bert Corona. Corona began to organize this sector of the community during a time when most other activists were concerned with the Vietnam War and the civil rights struggle.⁴¹

Corona's narrative provides significant accompaniment to Chicano histories, from broad-based texts like Acuña's *Occupied America* and John Chávez's *The Lost Land*, to regional studies like George Sánchez's *Becoming Mexican American* and social movement histories like Ernesto Chávez's "*¡Mi Raza Primero!*" and Maylei Blackwell's *¡Chicana Power!*. Like feminist *testimonios*, Corona's account adds names, details and anecdotes not found in traditional or early revisionist histories. For example, in regard to the Zoot Suit Riots, not only does Corona detail the discrimination enacted by the sailors and the Los Angeles press, but he also points out an important irony from his labor activist worldview—that many of the military bases in California relied on Mexican labor for food service, waste management and laundry, not to mention the Mexican American soldiers themselves. Corona thus

41. Acuña, 168.

portrays *pachucos* as workers, or as the children of workers, who aided labor struggles and not as the unemployed thugs that traditional histories reveal.⁴² Thus, as a complement to Chicana/o-Latina/o historical texts, Corona's narrative mediates a broad range of resistance practices exerted by Latinas/os in this era—from the masculinized and confrontational resistance in Acuña's work to the subtle but effective resistance that social historian Sarah Deutsch posits in *No Separate Refuge* or the explicitly feminist activism of Blackwell's *¡Chicana Power!*.

Corona was present at numerous Latina/o social struggles over a broad period of time, making his unique long view of this history particularly valuable. As an activist, Corona reveals many of the tensions among community activists, elected officials and intellectuals, as opposed to registering linear and triumphant pathways to victory. He provides political commentary on domestic labor and unionization struggles, international labor movements, McCarthy era politics and Johnson's Great Society and the effects of mainstream funding on labor and social justice organizations. For example, when discussing the McCarthy era political persecution of labor leaders, Josefina Fierro and Luisa Moreno, Corona is critical of the CIO's weak defense of its deportations. He comments disapprovingly, "Unfortunately, the efforts by the left...to defend labor leaders...extended only to those of European descent and not to Latinos"⁴³ This is compelling because it signifies the discrimination that Corona and other Latinas/os contended with as community and political activists engaging with mainstream social movements. Likewise, in defining the generation gap, which existed between Corona and his generation of activists and younger Chicana/o student activists of the 1960s and 1970s, Corona states, "I guess the generation of the sixties was a generation fed and raised on more idealistic principles than mine of the thirties. The generation of the sixties did not go through the crisis of the thirties."⁴⁴ What is unique about Corona's *testimonio* is that his proximity to various political struggles over the course of seven decades does not seem to lessen his grasp of the big picture of Latina/o

42. García, 104.

43. Ibid, 119.

44. Ibid, 260.

social justice nor does he seem to favor a specific struggle or signature event. Thus, Corona discloses a narrative genealogy of labor, community and political activism linked to a larger legacy of Latina/o community resistance. The continuity of resistance to oppression viewed through his life of activism is vital, creating a thread between the 1930s and the 1960s and through the 1990s. Corona not only provides significant revision to U.S. history through his *testimonio*, but he also complements and contextualizes current Chicana/o-Latina/o histories, which often focus on the 1960s and the Chicano Movement as the genesis of Mexican American activism.

Conclusion

Memories of Chicano History: The Life and Narrative of Bert Corona reveals a complex Chicano subject—made up of historical agent, unwavering activist, community member, family member and, via the *testimonio* form, a generative historical voice. Pragmatism, organizational savvy and grassroots opposition to injustice inform Corona's narrative. His position in the community and identification with the rank and file worker allow for a community-driven, "hands on" critical purview and voice. "Anyone who knows Bert," García writes, "knows that for him his public and private lives are so intertwined that at times it's hard to distinguish one from the other."⁴⁵ In response to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, for example, Corona characteristically recalls, "I couldn't bear to go to Bobby's funeral. Instead, I went on strike. It was good therapy."⁴⁶ Activism and community struggle served as a daily commitment and refuge for Corona. In a final narrative disclosure, he reveals his understated and pragmatic leadership style in considering his life of activism when stating, "I didn't really envision myself as being a labor leader all my life. My thinking was more constrained by the immediate task, which was vast."⁴⁷

45. Ibid, 343.

46. Ibid, 244.

47. Ibid, 96.

Corona's *testimonio* is an inventive text that is both generative and, at times, limited. The confluence of activist narrative and historiography in *Memories of Chicano History* further positions the *testimonio* as a valuable Latina/o genre, sustaining the legitimacy of such narratives that have been primarily safeguarded and defended by feminist scholars. Corona's narrative is an important contribution and complement to historical texts, bringing to life the events of twentieth-century Chicana/o-Latina/o history. As well, Corona's narrative posits an important and complex Latino agent, in conversation with a range of political actors and historical figures. The contribution of Corona's *testimonio*, however, comes at the expense of gendered analysis by García or critical self-reflection by Corona about his gendered privilege or access to positions of leadership in periods when women's participation was devalued, unrecognized or simply excluded. Whereas García located Corona's life narrative into a primarily feminist genre, the gendered implications of this choice—utilizing the life of the male subject to reveal multi-gendered communal histories—are largely unexplored. Corona, for his part, does relate the foundational role of his mother and grandmother in defining his worldview and sense of social justice that explicitly guided his long career. As well, through García's "prompting," key female activists and leaders—Josefina Fierro, Luisa Moreno, Dolores Huerta and Soledad "Chole" Alatorre—receive focused attention. Corona's life and political observations of several decades of Chicana/o-Latina/o activism, thus, complicate gendered discussions of the *testimonio* genre and, in form and content, contribute to our understanding of the structural, ideological and cultural elements that contributed to sexism within Chicana/o-Latina/o communities and social movements.

Corona's *testimonio* is part of a wide-ranging field with deep roots and new horizons. Reyes and Curry Rodríguez catalogued the growth of academic projects dedicated to the *testimonio* over the last twenty years. Between 1990 and 1999, thirty-six dissertations and thesis projects were indexed with *testimonio* as a keyword. This number grew substantially in the following decade to 835 dissertations and theses, demonstrating a panorama of new projects despite *testimonio*'s fledgling position in the

academy.⁴⁸ Such ongoing marginality reflects the continuing necessity to build an archive of otherwise unheard communal voices. Published books, for example, hail from various disciplines, including the aforementioned examples in Latina/o and Latin American Studies, as well as the field of education. Recent projects on queer oral historiography include examples such as *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (2012), edited by Nan Alamillo Boyd and Horacio Roque Ramírez, and *Gay Latino Studies: A Critical Reader* (2011), edited by Michael Hames-García and Ernesto Martínez. As well, immigrant youth have produced two books with a multiplicity of personal narratives (and editors) in *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Students Speak Out* (2008), edited by Gabriela Madera, Angelo A. Mathay, Armin M. Najafi, Hector H. Saldívar, Stephanie Solis, Alyssa Jane M. Titong, Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, Janna Shaddock-Hernández, Kent Wong, Rebecca Frazier and Julie Monroe, and *Undocumented and Unafraid: Tam Tran, Cinthya Felix, and the Immigrant Youth Movement* (2012), edited by Kent Wong, Janna Shaddock-Hernández, Fabiola Inzunza, Julie Monroe, Victor Narro and Abel Valenzuela, Jr. These projects reflect the ongoing richness of communal and plural authorship as well as new political directions in Latina/o politics that draw from and contribute to the *testimonio* genre.

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48. Reyes, et al., 532.

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Latinas and the Fractures That Unite Us: (Re)examining the Pan-Ethnic Marker

Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo

Abstract:

In this essay I continue a conversation started by Cristina Beltran about erasures within Latino unity, by introducing a discussion about the importance of fractures within and between communities that fall within the pan-Latino/a ethnicity. By fractures I mean the differences that result from specific (yet shared) experiences, and histories of U.S.-based people of Latin American descent. They can be a way to begin the process of de-erasing and re-incorporating that cultural history. The essay also seeks to engage with and apply Linda Martín Alcoff's critique of universal humanism by emphasizing the importance of fractures among Latinos. To further the discussion, I will use an issue of *Latina* magazine articulating Latina pride, which shall serve as an illustration to the problem of a venue (the magazine) trying to construct Latinidad by erasing fractures, the very elements that have the potential of infusing the "pan" aspect of pan-Latino with meaning.

I'm Latina! I think I was born with high heels. We crossed the border with high heels, running from immigration. No, I'm just kidding! Those were low compared to what I am used to wearing. I could do aerobics in heels.¹

—Eva Longoria (April 2006)

My Hispanic heritage means everything to me.²

—Eva Longoria (October 2011)

I think Mexican-Americans, which is the culture I come from, have the most amazing work ethic...³

—Eva Longoria (January 2012)

You know who I am. You need to know who you are.⁴

—Eva Longoria (February 2012)

Introduction: Latina as a Difficult Category

In the epigraphs above, Eva Longoria vacillates between identities (or are the very least, she vacillates between labels). By calling herself Latina while simultaneously invoking an immigrant status that she does not possess (i.e., “we crossed the border in high heels”), for she was born and raised in the United States, she is blurring the lines between at least two labels. She later calls herself Hispanic, and then she identifies as Mexican American. She seems to be equating these labels as if they

1. Lee, Michael J., “Eva Longoria on ‘The Sentinel.’”

2. “Eva Longoria Interview for Hispanic Heritage Month,” *Huff Post: Latino Voices*.

3. Gates, Sara, “Eva Longoria on the Latino Vote: ‘Romney on the Wrong Side of Every Issue.’” *Huff Post: Latino Voices*.

4. Barnes, Michael, “Intriguing Eva Longoria at the University of Texas,” *Austin360.com*.

all mean the same thing, which is why she so confidently finally tells a Texas crowd that they know who she is, for she has told them all along. However, the statements do not just blur labels but also that which the labels stand for: heritages, cultures and immigrant/citizenship status, to name a few. Thus, these epigraphs tell a story about Eva Longoria's ideas involving Latinidad in the U.S., but perhaps more importantly, they convey ideas that are prevalent among Latinos and non-Latinos alike about who is Latina and what is "Latina culture." These ideas have also contributed to the forging of a Latino pan-ethnicity, which, as I will discuss below, has been a highly commercialized "ethnicity" in the U.S.

In this essay I continue a conversation started by Cristina Beltrán about Latino unity by introducing a discussion about the importance of fractures within and between Latina/o communities. Beltrán tells us that "Latino pan-ethnicity has been fostered by a climate of xenophobia in which the regional and cultural history of all people of Latin American descent has been erased."⁵ Thus, what I propose with the fractures is a way to begin the process of de-erasing and re-incorporating that cultural history. By fractures, I mean the differences that result from specific (yet shared) experiences, and histories of U.S.-based people of Latin American descent. The examples that I provide in the discussion section of this essay (i.e., immigration/citizenship and language) are not meant to be all encompassing or exhaustive, but rather, they are meant as illustrations, as triggers of thoughtful consideration about the pan-ethnic identity and marker *as* a pan-ethnic identity and marker, that is to say, as a site where different peoples, cultures, ethnicities and nationalities coexist, take refuge and, at times, even collide. The most important thought I can offer about these fractures at this point is that they should not be seen as challenges to be overcome but, rather, as indelible marks in the landscape, something that those who identify with the pan-Latino marker may have to maneuver around, yes, but also something that paradoxically defines them as a unit. Moreover, some of the ways in which the label Latina/o is being used by popular culture and the media erase or forget those fractures. To make and illustrate my points, I will use a cover story from an issue of *Latina* magazine

5. Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity*, 7.

discussing Latina pride. The story shall serve as an illustration to the problem of a venue (the magazine) trying to construct Latinidad by erasing fractures. I am obviously not doing a comprehensive analysis of the media or even *Latina* magazine. Rather, I am using an article in one issue to illustrate a point that I am making, with the understanding that what I am saying about that article/issue/magazine applies to many other articles/issues/magazines. To illustrate this point, here are the titles of a few stories in the different issues of the magazine: “The #1 Place for a Latina to Live” (December 2004); “25 Books Every Latina Should Read” (September 2009); “Latinas at the Office: Do We Need to Tone Down our Sex Appeal?” (February 2011); “Special Report: Latinos and Marriage” (August 2011); and “Inside the Mind of the Latino Player” (September 2012).

***Latina* Magazine: Latina Pride as Exhibit One**

The December 2011/January 2012 issue of *Latina* magazine contained an article titled “70 Reasons to Love Being Latina Right Now.” The six-page spread featured a collection of figures, events and happenings involving Latinos/as that meant, in the magazine’s estimation, that the impact of Latinos and Latinas “on American culture can no longer be denied.”⁶ The article included information about men and women of Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Honduran, Mexican, Panamanian, Peruvian, Puerto Rican and Spanish descent, among others, while also highlighting different events and places. In fact, the article covered issues ranging from people’s activism, such as the efforts that led to the passing of the California Dream Act in 2011, to celebrity activism, including Ricky Martin’s “fight for gay rights” and Shakira’s involvement in the building of sport-related facilities in Miami, Florida and Cartagena, Colombia, via her foundation Pies Descalzos, to athletes’ accomplishments such as those of Mariano Rivera, hailed as “the greatest relief pitcher in baseball history,” and to Grammy award winners, like Esperanza Spalding and Bruno Mars, who were both described as “beautiful and leaders of music’s new cool.”

6. *Latina*, (December 2011/January 2012), 128-133.

The article touted Mexico as an escape for “Hollywood royalty.” It also touted Mexican American Daniel Hernández as a hero for running “into the fire” to care for Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, when she was shot in Arizona during a meeting with constituents, earlier in 2011. In keeping with mainstream fluff, the article also highlighted a few trivial claims including “our divorcées are hot” (featuring Jennifer Lopez, Christina Aguilera and Eva Longoria) and a few uninspiring ones, including “Our Midas can Rap” (referencing Cuban-American rapper Pitbull, without any mention of his women-degrading lyrics). The article boasted about Latinos inventing some incomprehensible “reverse crossover.” It also pointed out that “we” must be proud that with the name Miles Morales, in the world of comics, “The New Spiderman is Afro-Latino.” Further, under the heading “Learning is Second Nature to Us,” the article noted that Eva Longoria “began studying for a master’s degree in Chicano Studies,” bragging that because of her efforts, the actress “deserves an A+.”⁷

Reading about Longoria’s incursion into graduate school made me wonder, given that she is bound to be taking classes that engage in critical thinking, whether Longoria could look at that article and not cringe, especially when she is being touted as both the epitome of a hot divorcée and an A+ student, as if those two descriptors should garner equal amounts of pride among Latinas. As I was pondering Eva Longoria’s predicament, it occurred to me that for many reading the article, both Latina and non-Latina alike, there was perhaps nothing problematic about a piece pointing to a vacationing spot in Mexico, a Cuban rapper and female divorcées of all Latin American ancestries, as things and peoples of which and of whom all Latinas should be proud. I’m sure that many reading it saw nothing awkward about an article claiming that by financing a sports facility in Miami, a super-rich, Colombian artist is doing activism, just like the young students who participated in the grassroots movement that took place in California leading to the passing of the Dream Act in that state were doing activism. And I’m sure not many took offense at the suggestion that Daniel Hernandez’s bravery in the midst of chaos and flying bullets is somehow comparable to the

7. Ibid, 130.

adventures of a fictional Afro-Latino character in a comic book. After all, they're all Latinos/as: beautiful Puerto Vallarta, misogynist Pitbull, divorcée JLo, powerhouse Shakira, the mostly Mexican and Mexican American youths who took to the streets in California, brave Daniel Hernandez and the imaginary Spiderman kid all fall within the pan-ethnic marker. They all have been bestowed with the label Latino or Latina, and because of that, "we" Latinas should all be equally proud of every single one of them, the magazine suggests. In the end, the article presents its readers with differences that are being flattened by the all-encompassing Latina label, with pride as the primary generator of the label.

To reiterate, I am using this article in *Latina* magazine as an illustration of a problem that extends beyond any one magazine, encompassing all media (including the Latino media, a great percentage of which is owned and/or headed by non-Latinos and non-Latino corporations) and forms of popular culture: the careless articulations and the equally careless use of the pan-ethnic label (this time in its female version—Latina) and its homogenizing tendencies. After all, the "70 Reasons to Love Being Latina Right Now" headline has appeared on several issues of the magazine (e.g., June/July 2008; June/July 2009; December 2010; December/January 2013; etc.), making it a recurring theme. The consistently careless use of the pan-ethnic label has led to a fundamental problem espousing a double-sided argument that goes like this:

(1) "We" must be proud of all things Latino/a and all Latinos/as regardless of what and who *they* are; and

(2) "We" must be proud of all things Latino/a and Latinos/as regardless of who *we* are (as long, of course, as we identify or are identified as Latina).

Thus, I feel compelled to examine the use and commercial(ized) deployment of the pan-Latino label once again, especially in relation to articulations of pride. I would like to note that although I, and the authors I cite, will sometimes reference Latinos (in both the male and universal forms of the noun), I will focus on Latinas, with the understanding

that aspects of this discussion also apply to Latino males, while other aspects are particular to being a Latina in a culture that over-sexualizes, commodifies and altogether scapegoats those who fall or are placed within this category.

The Label Latina: in Proximity to Race and Ethnicity

In her book, *Visible Identities*, Linda Martín Alcoff tells us that today “the concern with identity has come under major attack from many oddly aligned fronts...in the academy as well as in the mainstream media...” as “...many still pine for the lost discourse of generic universality, for the days when differences could be disregarded.”⁸ Making a case for the importance of differences vis-à-vis specific identities, especially the pan-Latino identity, Alcoff argues that “the acknowledgment of the important differences in social identity does not lead inexorably to political relativism or fragmentation.”⁹ I will return to a discussion of universality and political fragmentation in my conclusion, but for now, I would like to emphasize Alcoff’s point about identity and difference, especially in relation to the pan-Latino umbrella as an acknowledged social identity. Arlene Dávila provides us with some insight here in her book, *Latinos Inc.*, where she suggests that Latino as identity is mediated by Latino as marker, both of which (that is, the identity and the marker), she conveys, are relatively new developments.¹⁰ Alcoff, of course, agrees with her, suggesting that dominant marketing media outlets have been able to foist a generic pan-Latino identity.

The maintenance and deployment of this generic identity is the basis of my argument in this paper, for this generic identity is maintained and deployed at the expense of important, if not vital specificities. Both Alcoff and Dávila are clear that the category (whether used as identity or as a marker) comes with its problems, especially in relation to commodification and marketing. In Dávila’s words:

8. Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, 5.

9. *Ibid.*, 6.

10. Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race*, 2.

[T]he production of Latinos as easily digestible and marketable within the larger structures of corporate America is...revealing of the global bases of contemporary identity formation and of how notions of place, nation, and race that are at play in the United States and in Latin America come to bear on these representations.¹¹

The (pan-)Latino identity and marker, which encompasses a multitude of national backgrounds, is both framed and deployed in relation to both race and ethnicity, although scholars are adamant about the fact that even though the category has been racialized, ultimately it is not a racial category.

Alcoff notes, “What better unites Latinas/os both across and even within our specific national cultures is not race or phenotype but precisely those features associated with culture: language, religious traditions, cultural values, characteristics of comportment.”¹² In her articulation, she positions the label in *proximity to* but never fully *within* ethnicity, for in her words:

[U]sing only ethnicity belies the reality of most Latinos’ everyday experiences, as well as obscures our own awareness about how ethnic identifications often do the work of race while seeming to be theoretically correct and politically advanced.¹³

However, she also stresses that like “African American,” the fact is that in the U.S. the category “Latina/o” operates as a racialized category,¹⁴ cautioning that “moving away from race to ethnicity is not necessarily moving away from race.”¹⁵ Alcoff concludes with the admonition: “Race dogs our steps; let us not run from it lest we cause

11. Ibid, 4.

12. Alcoff, 34.

13. Ibid, 247.

14. Ibid, 37.

15. Ibid, 38.

it to increase its determination.”¹⁶ Social scientists have been able to document more than adequately the relationship between the category Latino and race. Sociologist Tanya Golash-Boza, for instance, makes a startling connection between Latinos and race, by reminding us that mainstream culture and society regard Latinos and African Americans in very similar ways. More specifically, both groups are “seen as less intelligent, as more prone to be on welfare and more likely to be involved in drugs or other criminal activities than whites or Asians.”¹⁷ Thus, when it comes to mainstream culture, there really is no moving away from race.

Alcoff also brings up another important component of this equation at the end of her book, where she makes an appeal to the recognition of the differences between people of color and the fact that although racism is a constant among these groups, we must understand that it “is differentially distributed among [them].”¹⁸ Dávila provides us with insight into the working of this differential distribution of racism in relation to upward mobility, when she states that:

[I]n a nation whose racial formation has been constructed along a black-white dichotomy, African Americans have long served as reference to stories of immigrant upward mobility, the one group everyone is supposed to distance themselves from as they claim Americanness. If people couldn't be white, in other words, they could at least claim to be not black.¹⁹

The racialization of Latinos, of course, has been complicated when it comes to Latina identity, especially as it has, at times, operated through Latina representations in popular culture and the media, which trigger very specific articulations in the consciousness of mainstream America. This combination of articulations and representations of

16. Ibid, 246.

17. Rodríguez, Havidán, Rogelio Sáenz, and Cecilia Menjivar (eds.). “Preface.” *Latinas/os in the United States: Changing the Face of America*, xvi.

18. Alcoff, 262.

19. Dávila, 162.

Latinas in popular culture and the U.S. mainstream media has captured the analytical efforts of scholars within both the humanities and the social sciences. For instance, communications scholar Isabel Molina-Guzmán tells us that:

A cursory review of television, films, and tabloid celebrity coverage of Latinas over the past [few] years indicate[s] that the commercialized contours of the Latina body have retained their shape—curvaceous, dark hair, dark eyes, and phenotypic features that skew toward whiteness and away from blackness.²⁰

Representations (re)creating the contours of the Latina body are important in that, as Dávila reminds us that “as a group that is at once both living and socially imagined, Latinos continue to occupy a marginal position in society, even when they are joining the ranks of mainstream culture.” She continues, “This predicament frames and informs the terms and implications of their coming of age, as evidenced by the ongoing and heated debates over Latinos’ supposed impact on ‘American culture.’”²¹ Thus, it is necessary to understand that although we can talk today about what Beltrán refers to as “Latinowood,”²² the only alteration in the daily existence of non-celebrity Latinas has been a more resolute and invasive scrutiny of their bodies and a more direct questioning of their right to be “here,” along with a relentless effort to otherize and racialize them.

In fact, “since the mid-1990s,” (around the time the recent Latino boom in popular culture commenced), “the United States has enacted a series of laws that makes it easier to arrest, detain, and deport noncitizens,” bringing devastation to immigrant families, the majority of which are Latino and/or Latin American.²³ In addition, although the segregation index of Latinos and Latinas is lower than that of blacks, according to

20. Molina-Guzmán, *Dangerous Curves: Latina Bodies in the Media*, 176.

21. Dávila, 161.

22. Beltrán, *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: the Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom*.

23. Hagan, Castro, and Rodríguez, “The Effects of U.S. Deportations on Immigrant Families and Communities: Cross-Border Perspectives,” *North Carolina Law Review*.

the Population Studies Center at the University of Michigan, in 2009, in cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, Miami, Detroit and San Francisco, the segregation index of Latinos was over 50 points (where zero points signals full integration, and 100 signals full segregation), and in cities like New York, Los Angeles, Boston and Milwaukee, their segregation index was over 60 points.^{24,25} Segregation indices may be directly related to perceptions of Latinos. In fact, according to Leo Chavez, the U.S. has created a narrative around Latinos (he calls it the Latino Threat narrative), where they are articulated “as a destructive force” and where “Latino contributions to U.S. culture are obscured or given negative meanings.”²⁶ Thus, despite the Latinization of Hollywood, Latinos, whether born in the U.S. or in Latin America, are still clear targets of oppression in everyday U.S. society. Or in the words of Molina-Guzmán: “[D]espite the representational progress of some Latina[o] figures over the past decade, the political and economic realities faced by Latinas/os and Latina/o immigrants remain unchanged.”²⁷

This may be a direct result of what Joe Feagin has identified as the “white racial frame,” which he articulates as “an organized set of racialized ideas, stereotypes, emotions, and inclinations to discriminate,” which are “used to rationalize and legitimate systemic racism.”²⁸ And, of course, Latinos have had a long history of being a target of systemic racism in the U.S., for as José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe Feagin tell us, U.S. society has “belittled the physical appearance, Spanish language, Catholic traditions, and family values of Latin Americans at least since the 1830s.”²⁹ Ruben Rumbaut (2009) elaborates by arguing that “the

24. Population Studies Center, “New Racial Segregation Measures for States and Large Metropolitan Areas: Analysis of the 2005-2009 American Community Survey.”

25. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Populations Survey.”

26. Chavez, *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, 180.

27. Molina-Guzmán, 177.

28. Feagin, *Systemic Racism: a Theory of Oppression*, 28.

29. Cobas, Duany and Feagin, *How the United States Racializes Latinos: White*

peoples now construed as...‘Latinos’ occupied a liminal intermediate position in a white supremacist state, fraught with status ambiguity. Mexicans in the U.S. have been legally and officially classified as ‘white,’ yet socially treated as ‘nonwhite.’”³⁰ Thus, although the category has managed to straddle the line that separates race and ethnicity, in the end, it has, at times, been closer to one than the other, or to paraphrase Alcoff, moving away from one to the other has not really meant moving away from one to the other.

The Fractures of the Latina Label: Latina Pride as Exhibit Two

The fractures that I am talking about are present in the article by *Latina* magazine, although they are buried under the more marketable and homogenizing banners of numbers and “pride.” The article begins its narration by telling us that “we” are 50 million strong, thus implying that the first reason we have to be proud of being Latina is sheer numbers. Of course, it would be inaccurate to argue that this article is the only instance in which the magazine has privileged numbers and pride over specificities, for the magazine has historically pandered to the *pride* component of Latina pride, at the expense of the *Latina* component of Latina pride. That is, as part of a culture that has benefitted from commodifying the label Latina, the magazine has nurtured the nuances of pride while simultaneously creating a generic and flattened Latina category. For the magazine, a Latina may and should care about Dominican *mangú* at times or Puerto Rican *pasteles* other times or Mexican tamales on yet other occasions, but at the end of the day, or rather at the end of the issue, she must remain a generic Latina, one who feels pride in the category itself. Thus, by signifying everything that is identified as Latino, the marker has become self-constitutive and, therefore, devoid of any substantive meaning. This is why Latinas can turn into ethnic chameleons, as illustrated by Eva Longoria in the

Hegemony and its Consequences, 4.

30. Rumbaut, “Pigments of our Imagination: On the Racialization and Racial Identities of ‘Hispanics’ and ‘Latinos.’” In *How the United States Racializes Latinos*, 20.

epigraphs at the beginning of this essay, where she can be at one point a Mexican immigrant who has crossed the border (obviating the history that being an immigrant entails), a Mexican American at another (again, obviating the history that label carries) and Hispanic at some other point, and she may be studying Chicano Studies, but she will always, and without question, be Latina, with the emptiness this category evokes. Ultimately, that is who we know her to be.

Thus, I propose here that the fractures between the groups under the pan-Latino marker should be understood and highlighted, while cultivating an awareness of these fractures, with the understanding that the differences they evoke in no way detract from that which binds the different groups under the category together. Moreover, there must be an understanding of the dangers of a category that is both self-constitutive and self-referencing. By the same token, pride is a feeling that emerges from a sense of belonging, from a sense of community or from a sense of accomplishment. Although it is easy to gain a sense of belonging to a manufactured category such as Latina, as I will demonstrate below, it may be much more difficult to feel a sense of belonging once the category is actually operationalized and the nuances in the experiences of its members are highlighted. This is when the category's emptiness shines through, exposing its dangerous shortcomings.

In the interest of space, there are two specific fractures that I will focus on and that I think will make my point in the form of two well-known issues associated with Latinos:

- (1) Immigration and citizenship
- (2) Language

I understand that immigration and citizenship are two separate and distinct issues, but for the purposes of argumentation in this paper, I am combining them into one. I want to make a few points in relation to fractures, and I would like to begin by invoking the figure of "Latina mothers." Let's complicate that image a bit by remembering that some Latina mothers are immigrant to the country while their children are U.S. born; others are immigrant along with their children; while others

are immigrant and have a mixture of U.S.-born and immigrant children; and yet, other Latina mothers are U.S. born and so are their children. It is also important to consider at this point that the non-U.S.-born Latinas relate to the state at different levels: as naturalized citizens, as documented residents or as undocumented (im)migrants. They also have to deal with the relationship of both their non-U.S.-born and their U.S.-born children to the state. This is why I decided to combine immigration and citizenship, for even though they are two separate issues, they are closely related to each other, and in many cases, one (immigration) generates a discussion of the other (citizenship). Finally, let us think for a moment of the nuances involving Latinas and language. That is, in addition to the fact that some Latinas speak only Spanish, some speak only English and yet others speak both, as well as other languages at various levels of fluency, there are also women living in the U.S. and classified as Latinas who come from certain areas of Guatemala, Peru and Ecuador who speak neither Spanish nor English but their indigenous languages.

As I said, these are just examples of fractures. However, they are useful in illustrating my point, which is the following: How can we assume that all of the women listed earlier, with their varying experiences, backgrounds and positionalities in U.S. society, can feel the same way about every or any item referenced by *Latina* magazine in its article about Latina pride? How can we assume that they (individually or collectively) would even care about any of those peoples and events, let alone feel a sense pride about them? To be more specific, why would a Puerto Rican woman born on the island and now living in the U.S. and who has never been to Mexico feel pride about “Hollywood royalty” using Puerto Vallarta as a vacationing spot? (And I am not even contemplating the underlying dichotomy embedded in the claim, where wealthy celebrities can use Mexico for their pleasure while Mexican immigrants in the U.S. continue to be vilified). To continue with the questions: Is it okay for a Chicana to look at Cuban-American artist, Pitbull, with disdain instead of pride, given the misogynist slant of his lyrics, independently of the fact that he is a (debatable) good rap artist? Or is it okay for a Colombian immigrant woman trying to build a life in the U.S. not to give a darn about Jennifer Lopez’s civil status, whether she looks hot as a divorced

woman or not? Or, similarly, is it okay for a Peruvian immigrant trying to stay away from the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency while making a living and raising her children to not care about Shakira's foundation and Latinos in sports? *Latina* magazine seems to imply that belonging within the pan-ethnic umbrella (which all of these women do) should be a sufficient condition to generate pride among all these women. But is it? And should it? I am stating my arguments as questions because it is the best way I have found of fostering a space to continue the dialogue, which is ultimately the point of this essay.

Conclusion: Embracing the Fractures, Embracing Heterogeneity

In the introduction to her edited collection, *From Bananas to Buttocks*, Myra Mendible assures her readers that “the Latina body’ is a convenient fiction—a historical contingent, mass-produced combination of myth, desire, location, marketing, and political expedience.”³¹ Similarly, in her book, *The Trouble with Unity*, Cristina Beltrán tells us that “[t]he mass media portray Latinos as a collective body with common interests.”³² In fact, when talking about the pitfalls of Latinidad, Beltrán notes that, “Latinidad presumes that Latinos as a group share a common collective consciousness.”³³

Although the pan-Latino label and identity can be seen as a promising source of (em)power(ment), Latinos must learn to be careful about the use of the label (in all of its derivations) and about how they allow the label to be used by the market forces and mainstream culture. They must be especially wary of instances in which the label is manufactured and commercialized as an empty category, where the biggest argument revolves around numbers. In the end, it is important to understand that manufactured and commercialized Latina pride is the byproduct of a society that imagines Latinas in a very specific, narrow and sellable way. In fact, we could describe Latina pride as the

31. Mendible, *From Bananas to Buttocks: the Latina Body in Popular Film and Culture*, 1.

32. Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity*, 104.

33. *Ibid.*, 5.

byproduct of a society that imagines Latinas in one way and that forces those who fall within the category (by label or identity) to create a fundamentally empty space from which to operate and in which to take refuge from their daily existence in that very society. At the end of the day, *Latina* magazine can tell us that we must be proud of being part of the category Latina, even when the category is articulated through schizophrenic sound bites and pictures, as those schizophrenic sound bites and pictures become sanitized, commercialized and, paradoxically enough, homogenized.

This is why the fractures are important, as they are the elements that infuse the “pan” aspect of pan-Latino with meaning. I would like to invoke Alcoff’s discussion of universal humanism one more time. At the end of *Visible Identities* she admonishes: “[T]he discourse of humanism is...continually used as a smokescreen for oppression, to divert attention away from discriminatory practices and identity-based patterns of segregation and exclusion.”³⁴ It is evident from looking at *Latina* magazine that the discourse of Latina pride operates at the same level of the discourse of humanism invoked in Western societies, including the U.S. The discourse of Latina pride also serves as a smokescreen diverting attention away from patterns of discrimination and exclusion in an effort to convince us that we are all “universal” Latinas/os. We shall recognize that Alcoff’s argument about generic universality cuts both ways. That is, we must be careful not to turn the category Latina (or Latino) into a generically universal category. In other words, we must refuse to strive for a “generic universality” of Latinas and their experiences and must keep in mind that recognizing differences (i.e., fractures) among Latinas/os “does not lead inexorably to political relativism or fragmentation.”³⁵ Or as Clara Rodríguez clearly states: “Emphasizing the heterogeneity of the groups does not necessarily eliminate the commonalities that also exist between the groups.”³⁶ Beltrán makes a similar claim when providing us with an alternative way of conceptualizing *Latinidad* “as a moment when diverse and even disparate subjects claim identification with one

34. Alcoff, 290.

35. *Ibid.*, 6.

36. Rodríguez, In *Latinas/os in the United States*, viii.

another.”³⁷ Juan Flores also understands the importance of diversity and disparity when he tells us that “practical disjunctures do not necessarily invalidate the strategic prospects of formative processes of Latino unity.”³⁸ It is just possible that in our search for fairness and justice, fractures may indeed unite us under a label that actually means something, and that Eva Longoria can claim to be Tejana and let that stand, knowing that “we” will recognize that under all the glamour, the endorsements and tabloid gossip lies a person who is very different from but also close to “us” because, after all, being Tejana is a part of being Latina.

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37. Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity*, 168.

38. Flores, *From Bomba to Hip Hop*, 165.

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Defending *Pachamama*: The Rights of Nature in Ecuador

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Abstract:

In 2008, the people of Ecuador approved a new constitution that granted Nature (or *Pachamama*) legal rights and standing in court—the first country to do so in the world. This article examines Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and its innovative legal framework. The first part is a brief review of Ecuador's dependent mode of development based on extractive industries such as oil, focusing on the impact of oil extraction on indigenous communities. The second part examines Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and the inclusion of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay*, indigenous views of nature that are being used to redefine the relationship between humans and their environment by relying on traditional Andean beliefs. The article concludes with a look at the future of indigenous environmental justice in Ecuador and reassesses the impact of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* as environmental justice concepts that seek to challenge the materialistic worldview inherent in colonial capitalism.

In 2008, the people of Ecuador approved a new constitution that granted Nature (or *Pachamama*) legal rights and standing in court—the first country to do so in the world.¹ Just fifteen years before (in 1993), some 30,000 Ecuadorians residing in the country’s northern Amazonian region accused oil giant Texaco (later acquired by Chevron in 2001) of dumping over 17 billion gallons of toxic materials (including crude oil) into its rivers from 1972 to 1992.² While Texaco made billions in profits by exporting Ecuadorian oil, local Amazonian populations (many of them indigenous Ecuadorian groups) suffered the consequences in terms of pollution, environmental degradation and threats to their health, as the government stood by idly while it, too, profited from oil revenues. Chevron was found guilty and fined by Ecuadorian courts, and the case is currently under appeal. These two events seem to signal a major shift in Ecuador’s use and abuse of its natural resources; not only is Mother Nature now constitutionally protected in Ecuador but, also, one of the country’s top polluters is now legally liable and could potentially end up paying billions of dollars in reparations.

Not coincidentally, both events transpired during the left-of-center administration of President Rafael Correa, a nationalist advocate for the protection and preservation of Ecuador’s natural resources. Paradoxically, Correa also seeks to give Ecuador greater control over the exploitation of the country’s natural resources (mainly oil and mining) as well as the profits that stem from them. However, while the Correa administration has been instrumental in facilitating these pivotal events, the real voice behind these struggles has been the rise of an indigenous environmental justice movement that for decades has been framing these issues in terms of indigenous rights.³

1. Smith, Gar, “In Ecuador, Trees Now Have Rights,” *Earth Island Journal*, 15.

2. Amazon Watch, “Chevron’s Chernobyl in the Amazon.”

3. While in most cases examined in this article, the term “indigenous environmental justice movement” mainly includes local, regional and national political organizations made up of Ecuadorian Indians, in some other cases (such as the struggle against Texaco/Chevron) it may also include non-indigenous groups, such as *mestizos*, *colonos* (poor settlers who moved to Ecuador’s Amazonian region attracted by land and jobs) and other political allies, such as labor unions, peasant movements, religious organizations and environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

This article examines Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and its innovative legal framework. The first part is a brief review of Ecuador's dependent mode of development based on extractive industries such as oil, focusing on the impact of oil extraction on indigenous communities. The second part examines Ecuador's 2008 Constitution and the inclusion of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay*, indigenous views of nature that are being used to redefine the relationship between humans and their environment by relying on traditional Andean beliefs. The article concludes with a look at the future of indigenous environmental justice in Ecuador and reassesses the impact of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* as environmental justice concepts that seek to challenge the materialistic worldview inherent in colonial capitalism. I argue in this article that both concepts represent significant, original indigenous theoretical contributions to the environmental justice field that are opening pathways to the redefinition of environmental politics in South America's Andean nations and indigenous, subaltern politics around the world.

The Politics of Oil

The discovery of oil in Ecuador's *Oriente* in the late 1960s transformed the country into an oil exporter and exacerbated the country's historical dependence on a single commodity, this time a non-renewable resource. The pernicious side effects of this "resource curse" of dependency resulting in debt and inflationary crises forced Ecuadorian administrations to implement neoliberal measures dictated by international lending organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF).⁴ They proved highly unpopular among the impoverished masses and led to the collapse of presidential administrations. Ecuador found itself in the paradoxical situation of being a poor country while it exported millions of dollars worth of oil every year. But Ecuador's troubled relationship with its oil wealth goes beyond mere macroeconomic challenges. As a petrostate, Ecuador has had to establish priorities that have caused irreparable harm to its environment, natural resources and

4. Conaghan, Catherine M., "Ecuador: From Crisis to Left Turn," in *Latin American Politics and Development*, 370.

its people, particularly its indigenous communities.

Texaco, a U.S.-based multinational company, found oil in the rainforest in the northeastern part of the country in the 1960s. The discovery of oil in the Amazon implied such a monetary windfall for the Ecuadorian state that financial considerations trumped all others (human, environmental, etc.). The continued extraction of oil and the flow of resources to the state's coffers became the nation's number one priority (with oil revenues accounting for half of Ecuador's income) both under military governments and civilian administrations. According to the prevailing views regarding development, only through the fullest exploitation of these resources could the nation aspire to combat ills, such as poverty and underdevelopment. In the end, neither goal was achieved. Quite the opposite, Ecuador remains poor and underdeveloped (by these standards) and more dependent than ever on a single commodity that pollutes its diverse ecosystems.

The long-term, intensive exploitation of oil reserves by Texaco and other companies (most notably the state oil company PetroEcuador) created multiple forms of pollution. First (and most toxic) were the frequent oil spills, which were eventually carried into waterways by the torrential downpours of the rain forest, where even small amounts of oil can contaminate millions of gallons of water.⁵ Second, 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater were released into Amazonian waterways (a practice that is banned in the United States). Third, gas (another byproduct of oil extraction) is burned as it comes out of the ground (gas flaring), polluting the air and releasing enormous amounts of carbon dioxide. Finally, Texaco personnel buried tons of oily trash (e.g., oils filters and cans) in pits that they later covered with a thin layer of soil.

As a result of the unchecked pollution of the Ecuadorian Amazon by the oil industry, thousands of locals have become sick with polluted water, developed various types of cancers and other diseases. Birth defects have become more common among the population. In total, as

5. Roberts, J. Timmons and Nikki D. Thanos, *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America*, 170.

many as 1,400 excess cancer deaths have been attributed to oil pollution.⁶ In addition, the local indigenous populations, now unable to live off of the land on their own terms, have sunk deeper into poverty. Not only did Texaco pollute the Ecuadorian Amazon, it did so with impunity. The Ecuadorian government allowed Texaco to self-regulate its operations in the country, and not surprisingly, Texaco chose to cut corners when it came to minimizing environmental impacts to maximize profits.⁷

A New Constitution for Ecuador

Neoliberalism is more than just an economic model and a political project; it is also the latest imposition of Western thought (internalized by Ecuador's elites) on the region's indigenous peoples. Neoliberalism, as well as previous "modernizing" projects imposed by colonial and post-colonial masters, represents a Western way of thinking, a set of cultural values and ideas and "ways of knowing and relating to the world"⁸ that are significantly different from the community-oriented ways of indigenous peoples. Indigenous organizations, thus, began articulating a subaltern discourse that placed indigenous culture and ways on an equal footing with others in Ecuadorian society, framing these demands as a human rights issue. They argued that indigenous Ecuadorians (like other groups in society) have political and cultural rights (including territory and access to resources) that the state and international actors ought to recognize and validate.⁹ From this perspective, the demand for the recognition of indigenous nationalities and of a plurinational state was part and parcel of their survival as a people. Interestingly, this recognition, in turn, shaped how indigeneity is articulated in Ecuador, as more and more indigenous groups have adopted an image of themselves

6. Amazon Watch.

7. Widener, Patricia, *Oil Injustice: Resisting and Conceding a Pipeline in Ecuador*, 263.

8. Valdivia, Gabriela, "On Indigeneity, Change, and Representation in the Northeastern Ecuadorian Amazon," *Environment and Planning A*, 289.

9. The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples (in Article 7) recognizes that "indigenous peoples have the collective right to live in freedom, peace and security as distinct peoples."

as conservationists and a subaltern discourse to go along with it. This new environmental justice discourse has united indigenous communities (under hybrid identities) in fighting oil, logging and mining companies (with the support of environmental NGOs like Acción Ecológica) while promoting locally controlled economic activities such as eco-tourism that are more consonant with their new image of indigeneity.¹⁰ By the time of the 2006 presidential election, indigenous organizations had an established base of supporters, a well-articulated political discourse and a demonstrated veto capacity vis-à-vis the Ecuadorian state.

The inauguration of President Rafael Correa in 2007 gave indigenous groups the political opening for which they had been waiting. While in the past, governments had opposed indigenous claims—and only relented when their survival was at stake—the Correa administration lent a sympathetic ear to indigenous struggles even before it was elected. Once in power, Correa governed by making direct appeals to the people in a series of elections that consolidated his power and ushered in a new constitution. He provided subsidies to poor families and increased public spending while taxing foreign multinationals—moves that made him the most popular president in Ecuador’s history with a 73 percent approval rating around the time of his inauguration.¹¹ The highlight of his first term was the 2008 Constitution, in which (at least publicly) he supported longstanding indigenous claims.

The 2008 Constitution represented a new start for most Ecuadorians but particularly for the country’s indigenous population, which voted overwhelmingly in the 2007 referendum in favor of its drafting. Indigenous movements supported and monitored the work of the constitutional assembly.¹² However, the tensions between radical social movements and a state embedded within capitalist coloniality made themselves felt in the struggles over what was and was not included

10. Valdivia.

11. Conaghan, 374.

12. Becker, Marc, “Correa, Indigenous Movements, and the Writing of a New Constitution in Ecuador,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 49.

in the new constitution.¹³ The first item on the indigenous agenda was the redefinition of the Ecuadorian state as plurinational, which was included in Article 1 of the Constitution. While its constitutional definition involved a recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and other historically oppressed groups (such as Afro-Ecuadorians) to land, culture and domestic decision-making powers, it fell short of granting them any kind of sovereign rights (for example, to expel companies from their lands). In quite the opposite, the 2008 Constitution defined Ecuador as “unitary” (Article 1), while stressing that “indigenous communities, pueblos and nationalities, the Afro-Ecuadorian people, the *montubio* people [of the coastal range] and communes are part of the Ecuadorian State, single and indivisible” (Article 56).¹⁴ Moreover, Articles 261 and 408 place energy resources (including mining, oil extraction, biodiversity and forestry resources) exclusively in the hands of the national government.¹⁵ In other words, while the Correa administration made significant symbolic concessions to indigenous Ecuadorians (and other historically oppressed groups), it still kept a tight leash on the control of resources by adroitly playing indigenous groups against each other and using the power of its majority coalition to increase the range of presidential powers in the 2008 Constitution.¹⁶ Still, indigenous organizations such as CONAIE (Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador; Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) claimed victory over the definition of Ecuador as a plurinational state and proclaimed itself the government of the nationalities and indigenous peoples of Ecuador. Based on those claims, CONAIE seeks to challenge the government’s development model, which rests on the exploitation of the country’s natural resources.¹⁷

13. See Becker and see Jameson, Kenneth P, “The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador: The Struggle for a Plurinational State,” *Latin American Perspectives*, for systematic analyses of these struggles.

14. All translations are by the author.

15. República del Ecuador, “Constitución de la República del Ecuador,” 128, 181.

16. *Latin American Weekly Report*, “Correa at Loggerheads with Indigenous Groups,” 4.

17. Jameson.

Another thorny issue was the demand for the promotion of indigenous languages to the category of official languages equal to Spanish. Correa's delegates voted against it, a move strongly opposed by indigenous organizations that—fed up with Correa's political manipulations—called him a racist.¹⁸ The solution was to declare Spanish, Kichwa and Shuar as “official languages for intercultural relationships” while Spanish retained its primacy as the official Ecuadorian language. Finally, the collective rights of indigenous peoples (already recognized in the 1998 Constitution) were expanded and now included Afro-Ecuadorians and other communities.¹⁹ However, it still remains to be seen how these gains achieved by CONAIE and other indigenous groups will translate into actual rights and benefits for them. Many of these principled statements will require legislation to become codified into law and enforceable. While the 2008 Constitution was widely approved by voters (and supported by indigenous groups like CONAIE), negotiating with the Correa administration was a bittersweet experience for indigenous organizations and environmentalists, who felt that the administration paid mere lip service to their causes and would not dare include more radical language in the document. It also showed the limits of subaltern politics vis-à-vis a powerful political machine, which also had the backing of the state. Change from below is still hard to effect in Ecuador, even when dealing with a seemingly sympathetic and progressive administration, as the state is embedded within the logic of capitalist coloniality while the nation's history keeps being defined more by the continuity of the coloniality of power for the past five centuries than for path-breaking change.

Defending *Pachamama*

Regardless of the shortcomings of the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution, one thing remains clear: It marked a significant symbolic and discursive break with the past. Perhaps nowhere was its uniqueness more clear than when it came to issues of environmental protection

18. Becker, 56.

19. Ibid, 146.

and environmental justice. The 2008 Constitution was the first one in the world to grant legal rights to Nature (Article 71). While other constitutions in the region had already made a point of guaranteeing their citizens certain environmental rights (e.g., the right to live in a clean, healthy environment), Ecuador granted rights to Nature itself. In other words, Nature has legal standing in Ecuadorian courts, and any person or group can demand the observance of these rights on Nature's behalf.²⁰ Moreover, Nature also has the right to be restored (Article 72) and protected from internal and external threats (Article 73). Finally, as with other constitutions, individuals and communities have the right to a good quality of life by benefiting from their environment and natural resources (Article 74).²¹ The inclusion of these articles was the result of lobbying from indigenous groups like CONAIE and environmental NGOs like Acción Ecológica, as well as the support from constitutional assembly president Alberto Acosta. Thanks to their efforts, two subaltern, indigenous environmental justice concepts figure prominently in the 2008 Constitution: *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay*. Both of them are enshrined in the Constitution's preamble and referenced in articles throughout.

Pachamama, or Mother Nature (though literally Mother World), is an Andean deity revered by the indigenous peoples of the region. A goddess of fertility, *Pachamama* presides over planting and harvesting, and after the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors and the forced conversion of the indigenous people to Catholicism, she became identified with the Virgin Mary. As a mother of all and provider of life, Andean indigenous societies have a relationship with *Pachamama* that stands in sharp contrast with Western conceptions of Nature. While in the European world Nature needs to be conquered and domesticated, in indigenous societies human beings are an intrinsic part of Nature and live within it (rather than from it). Human beings and *Pachamama*—like a mother and child—form a strong, interdependent, sacred bond that cannot be broken or threatened. *Pachamama* has to be respected, cared for and protected. Likewise, all life is considered sacred and valuable,

20. An innovative idea made famous by U.S. legal scholar, Christopher D. Stone.

21. República, 52.

and everything has “life energy,” even mountains, rivers and rocks.²²

It is a biocentric view of the world that rejects Western anthropocentrism’s drive to commodify and control everything, including Nature. As a result, any activity that seeks to exploit Nature without protecting it and giving back to it breaks its harmonious cycle of life and endangers everything in *Pachamama*, including human beings themselves. For indigenous Andean societies, *Pachamama* has always had rights. While oil extraction is considered a worthy and very profitable enterprise in Western societies, for indigenous societies it is akin to injuring and defacing *Pachamama*. Some indigenous societies in the Amazon even think of oil as the earth’s blood, which the white man spills in his hunger for profits. This contrast between individual entitlement and ownership of resources versus a collective approach in which human beings see themselves as an intrinsic part of a greater whole lies at the root of the debate over Nature’s rights in Ecuador. The concept of *Pachamama*, while originally belonging to Andean indigenous cultures, has spread around to other peoples and nations in the region. It is a subaltern and long-denied cosmology that it is gaining new ground and being re-articulated in the contemporary political juncture—the product of hybrid identities affected by coloniality and a good example of border thinking.²³

Sumak kawsay (*buen vivir* in Spanish, “living well” or “collective wellbeing” in English) is the other main indigenous contribution to Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution and to the indigenous environmental justice discourse. In Ecuador (as in the developing South), “development” has always implied more than just an economic model; it is also a Western model of judgment and control over life.²⁴ Moreover, development is

22. Chávez Quispe, María, “Transformative Spirituality for a Transformed World: Contributions from the Indigenous Perspective”; Pacari, Nina, “Naturaleza y territorio desde la mirada de los pueblos indígenas,” in *Derechos de la Naturaleza: El futuro es ahora*.

23. Mignolo, Walter D., *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*.

24. Walsh, Catherine E, “Development as Buen Vivir: Institutional Arrangements and (De)colonial Entanglements,” *Development*, 15.

seen as linear, in which nations advance from being pre-modern and “backward” to becoming modern and “developed.” The subaltern Andean concept of *sumak kawsay* runs counter to this Western view of progress. Rather than being linear, *sumak kawsay* prescribes a holistic, harmonious relationship with Nature, where there is no “before” or “after” but, rather, a balanced lifestyle where human beings take just what they need from Nature, protect it so it can keep on giving and give back to it as they take.²⁵ As everything is embodied with sacred life, the ownership and control of natural resources is seen as destroying the harmony inherent in *sumak kawsay*, thus, it is not surprising to witness the stiff resistance that indigenous groups put up when foreign companies tried to privatize the water supply (as in Bolivia’s case). Water sustains life and has life. The same can be said of other natural resources that neoliberalism sees as commodities to be bought and sold in the global marketplace (including foodstuffs)—a worldview that clashes with indigenous cosmologies, epistemologies and ways of life.

Ecuador’s 2008 Constitution includes several articles that promote *sumak kawsay*, starting with its preamble. Article 12 establishes water as an inalienable right, while Article 13 grants the right to healthy food for citizens while setting the goal of achieving food sovereignty. Other articles guarantee rights to information, communications, education, a clean environment, cultural identity and cultural expressions, housing, health care and work—all part of what *sumak kawsay* should include.²⁶ So while in a way *sumak kawsay* requires that citizens think and act based on ancestral Andean principles,²⁷ it is not a return to a romanticized pre-contact past.²⁸ Actually, its implementation looks to a post-petroleum Ecuador, not in the sense of replacing monocultural dependency on

25. Quintero, Rafael, “Las innovaciones conceptuales de la constitución de 2008 y el *sumak kawsay*,” in *El Buen Vivir: Una vía para el desarrollo*; Wray, Norman, “Los retos del régimen de desarrollo: El buen vivir en la constitución,” in *El Buen Vivir: Una vía para el desarrollo*.

26. República.

27. Walsh, 19.

28. Gudynas, Eduardo, “Buen vivir: germinando alternativas al desarrollo,” *América Latina en movimiento*, 17.

one product for another (as Ecuador has done throughout its modern history) but in moving beyond a model that has siphoned off billions of dollars while keeping millions of Ecuadorians in poverty. It is not a matter of living better; it is a matter of simply living well. *Sumak kawsay* thus offers a more viable, just alternative that appeals to longstanding indigenous values of solidarity, fraternity, reciprocity and community-based relations while preserving the integrity of *Pachamama*.²⁹ In an expression of border thinking from below, Ecuador's subaltern indigenous discourse squarely rejects Western materialism and its coloniality of power in favor of a more balanced, harmonic life and in doing so, provides a preferable option for those whose lives have been dislocated by neoliberalism.

Conclusion

Given Ecuador's uneasy relationship with its natural resources (best exemplified by the Texaco/Chevron case), it comes as no surprise that the country made headlines when it became the first one in the world to grant rights to Nature. The idea was bold and imaginative, and it firmly placed Ecuador in a new category of "green" nations, where not even a leader such as Costa Rica has entertained such a move. Ecuador's place in the theoretical and political debate about environmental justice is guaranteed, and already other nations (such as Bolivia) have enacted or are considering similar measures. Moreover, Ecuador's 2008 Constitution gave a firm, public voice to a segment of its population that had been kept silent for over 500 years: its indigenous peoples. The inclusion of indigenous concepts such as *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* and their prominence in the 2008 Constitution speak volumes about the new role of indigenous groups in Ecuadorian society (a role that they most definitely earned through their political activism in the 1990s). For the first time ever, indigenous ways of knowledge—a border-thinking practice—figure prominently in Ecuador's political discourse and in the supreme law of the land, where an ontological conflict between a biocentric indigenous world view and an anthropocentric

29. Walsh, 16.

Western world view still awaits resolution.³⁰ Regardless of how the conflict gets resolved, Ecuador's indigenous peoples have forced the country's elites to acknowledge their subaltern discourse, to accept their ontologies as legitimate and to face the fact that they will not accept the Western neoliberal model without resistance (as CONAIE's massive street protests have shown). While these constitutional provisions do not mean that Ecuador's indigenous peoples are now emancipated, it grants them a political prominence and influence that they lack in most of the world, while highlighting the limits of their capacity to enact change from below.³¹

Of course, there are significant barriers to the implementation of these concepts into the reality of Ecuadorian development. CONAIE and other indigenous organizations have clashed with the Correa administration over mining and oil concessions, leading to marches, street protests and roadblocks throughout the country.³² Indigenous movements and environmental organizations that have criticized the government's development model and heavy-handed policies are being increasingly marginalized. Correa's dependence on oil (and more recently on mining) for the financing of his nationalist social agenda has essentially shifted the exploitation of Ecuador's natural resources to the public sector. In this scheme, natural resources belong to the nation, and their profits will pay for development. Thus, some sacrifices are expected for the greater good of the Ecuadorian people. Only by resorting to capitalism can the socialist agenda be furthered, and those who oppose Correa's "Citizen's Revolution" are labeled counter-revolutionaries, a move that justifies military repression against indigenous groups. Unfortunately, oftentimes indigenous communities are expected to pay the price for the nation's development, both before Correa took office and now under his administration. In a continuation of the coloniality of power that has besieged Ecuadorians for centuries, the Ecuadorian state has increased its presence and control over the oil sector to become

30. Gudynas, 14.

31. Becker; Benavides, O. Hugo, *Making Ecuadorian Histories: Four Centuries of Defining Power*.

32. Solano, Gonzalo, "Indians Protest in Ecuador Against Mining Projects."

the latest exploiter in this industry. Moreover, Correa's political coalition of the poor, employees in the public sector and business elites in the oil sector has undermined the class-based electoral appeal of the radical social movements, now eclipsed by Correa's ongoing popularity (he was easily re-elected to a second term on February 17, 2013). His use of oil revenues to cobble this coalition together has relegated the radical social movements (like CONAIE) to playing the role of a marginalized (but well-organized) opposition now locked in permanent "resistance mode" and struggling to maintain its base of power among lower-class, indigenous Ecuadorians.³³ If oil prices remain high, it is unlikely that the class and ethnicity-based appeals of the radical social movements will gain much traction among the electorate.

Finally, does Ecuador's initiative represent a model for other countries within and outside the region to follow? So far, only Bolivia seems to be copying parts of Ecuador's model while other countries in the region, in contrast, have fully embraced the neoliberal export-oriented model. However, as environmental protection becomes an increasingly salient political issue, Ecuador's bold initiatives in matters of environmental justice and preservation of its rich ecosystems are bound to be copied by other nations to a greater or lesser extent. On April 22, 2010, the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth (held in Cochabamba, Bolivia) adopted a "Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth" that echoed many of the ideas in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution (as well as Bolivia's 2009 Constitution). In the developed North, Ecuador's model dovetails with ideas regarding deep ecology³⁴ and ecologism³⁵ in its holistic view of Nature and our relationship with it, and it could strike a chord with the North's ecological movement, its NGOs and green party administrations

33. Petras, James, "Ecuador: Left-Center Political Regimes Versus Radical Social Movements," *LAP Political Report*.

34. Snyder, Gary, "The Rediscovery of Turtle Island," in *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*.

35. Leis, Hector R. and Eduardo J. Viola, "Towards a Sustainable Future: The Organizing Role of Ecologism in the North-South Relationship," in *Greening Environmental Policy: The Politics of a Sustainable Future*.

(particularly in Nordic countries).

The legal decision against Texaco/Chevron, the granting of legal standing to Nature and the inclusion of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* in Ecuador's 2008 Constitution represent significant accomplishments for indigenous environmental justice, particularly in light of the coloniality of power that persists to this day in Latin America. For the first time since the vogue of dependency theory decades ago, we have an incipient Latin American model (at least in theory) with the potential to influence not only its neighbors (which it has already done) but, also, countries outside the region. Ecuador's subaltern indigenous environmental justice discourse could become potentially more influential as the forces of neoliberalism cause more environmental destruction around the world, and its class-based discourse could broaden its appeal among the region's poor. Its biocentric constitutional provisions challenge the anthropocentric monopoly of Western-styled constitutions around the world, where the protection of Nature (when it takes place) is solely seen in relation to its benefit for human beings. Moreover, long-denied indigenous ontologies and subaltern discourses are being given equal standing with Western ideas of development and modernization, as indigenous border thinking carves a theoretical and political space of its own. The full implementation of these new ideas presents a major challenge, but Ecuador is certainly being challenged from below, sometimes even with the acquiescence of progressive sectors from above.

Rather than sticking to neoliberal development models that have done little to improve the lot of its people, many Ecuadorians (from all backgrounds) are now seeking local solutions in the ways and knowledge of their indigenous population. The defense of *Pachamama* and *sumak kawsay* is more than an indigenous struggle; both concepts (if implemented) promise a more egalitarian society for all Ecuadorians and a more judicious use of Ecuador's natural resources. If CONAIE and other indigenous organizations develop these concepts to where they gain traction among the general public, not only could indigenous political parties like Pachakutik achieve electoral gains but the concepts themselves, too, might be embraced by a larger non-indigenous sector of the population. Still, it remains to be seen whether Ecuador's leadership

will commit itself to it or remain chained to neoliberal development models based on extractive industries, a dilemma best summed up in the words of former priest Eduardo Delgado when he said: “A state is not plurinational if it only takes the folkloric aspects into account but doesn’t revise its development model.”³⁶ For these changes to be truly significant, Ecuador’s main subaltern political actors—its indigenous peoples—first must overcome centuries of political marginalization. Democratization, according to Quijano, “must imply, first of all, a process of decolonization of the social, cultural and political relations between ‘races’ or, more precisely, between ‘European’ and non-‘European’ groups and elements of social existence.”³⁷ After five centuries of waiting for change from above, Ecuador’s indigenous peoples are taking significant steps to effect change from below.

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36. Saavedra, Luis A, “Indecision Ahead of Constitution Vote,” *Latinamerica Press*.

37. Quijano, Anibal, “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America,” *International Sociology*, 228.

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Who's Laughing Now?: Cultural Humor in Mexican American Theatre for Young Audiences

Roxanne Schroeder-Arce

Abstract:

Latino Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is in the process of developing itself toward a more nuanced sense of cultural authenticity. By worrying less about pandering to mainstream United States culture, Latino TYA plays look to engage young Latinos in a manner that recognizes and stimulates their unique cultural fluency. Through analysis of three Latino—specifically, Mexican American—TYA scripts, this paper assesses the deployment of culturally specific humor in particular, understanding such humor as a meaningful technique that eases cultural conflict and activates community among Mexican American children and families. I argue that the potential impact of playwrights and theatres offering plays that are more sincerely concerned with representing the Mexican American experience truthfully, rather than translating culture for the education and entertainment of members of the mainstream culture, is that Mexican American families finally have an opportunity to have a mimetic experience that refuses to make “others” out of them.

Over the past few decades, significant growth in Latino Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in the United States has been demonstrated through increased visibility, accessibility and accurate cultural representation. While Latino TYA plays were once fully translated into two languages on the page—every word intended to be spoken first in Spanish and then English or vice versa—many contemporary Latino TYA scripts are now truly bilingual, fusing the two languages as many Mexican American and other U.S. Latino communities do in their everyday speech. In addition to developing a more genuine dialect between characters, the field of TYA continues to take great strides toward the creation of deeply meaningful and precise cultural representations. Rather than serving as a vehicle to inform others—non-Latinos/as in this case—of Latino culture, contemporary Latino TYA plays accurately depict cultural experiences and do not typically translate these experiences for those outside the community.

This paper examines three TYA plays that share a variety of perspectives of the Mexican American experience and precisely looks at how culturally specific humor in these plays serves Mexican American youth audiences. Through an analysis of *Calabazas Street* by José Cruz González, *Alicia in Wonder Tierra* by Sylvia Gonzalez S. and my own play, *Señora Tortuga*, this paper asks: What is Mexican American humor? Who benefits from experiencing the comedy in these culturally specific stories? How is Mexican American humor lost on some audiences? What happens when the current but shifting majority culture is “othered” in these productions? Ultimately, I argue that playwrights and theatre companies are poised to foster meaningful experiences for Mexican American audiences by offering humor that speaks to those who are culturally fluent, rather than the practices of the past where such works catered to mainstream culture and translated cultural references and, thus, labeled Mexican Americans as “other.”

For the purpose of this paper, I use Kent Koppelman’s definition of “otherness,” which he describes in the following excerpt from his book *The Great Diversity Debate*:

Differences have not automatically defined a particular

group as an enemy, but have meant the group was 'the other' and was to be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion and mistrust.¹

In the U.S., Latinos are often viewed as other, and while some citizens seek to nurture a more pluralistic society, truly embracing cultural differences, many still cling to the melting pot idea intended to make U.S. society more homogeneous, encouraging sameness and assimilation. While some TYA companies have made efforts of getting more bodies of color on stage by selecting shows where roles can be played by "anybody," others have consciously selected stories of non-normative cultural groups and rather than trying to make them legible by the dominant culture, hence making culturally specific theatre assimilate, they cater to the culturally fluent of any group. In this paper, I focus on plays that share Latino and specifically Mexican American stories, however, I suggest that all non-normative cultural groups can benefit by catering to their own cultural fluency. Also, whether companies select these plays to produce is another challenge to be explored. Again, here I focus on the plays that are now available for both Latino theatre companies and historically white theatre companies to share. Perhaps such plays that do cater to Mexican American culturally fluent audiences are less likely to be produced by historically white companies.

The predominant research on U.S. culturally specific humor mainly speaks to the Jewish and African American experience; few scholars have examined Mexican American ethnic humor. To do so, therefore, I borrow a framework from Charles Gruner's book, *The Game of Humor*, where the author describes the three main characteristics of Jewish humor:

- (1) An intellectual dimension: a desire to distort the reality, to alter it and make it laughable (and thus less frightening and threatening)...
- (2) A social dimension: trying to maintain internal

1. Koppelman, *The Great Diversity Debate: Embracing Pluralism in School and Society*, 7.

cohesiveness and identity...

- (3) An emotional aspect: helping one to see oneself as one is, namely far from perfect...²

Interestingly, in each of the three Mexican American TYA plays I am examining, one or all of Gruner's characteristics are present.

In *Calabasas Street*, playwright José Cruz González incorporates a great deal of humor that inspires both children and adults to squeal and wiggle in their chairs with delight. Below, the lead character, Domingo, and his two sisters discuss the woman who lives on their street, Calabasas Street:

VIERNES. Look, Miercoles, la Loca's going into her house.

MIERCOLES. I heard lots of people went into that house and never came out, Viernes.

VIERNES. Really?

MIERCOLES. Some say she even killed her children.

DOMINGO. Is she La Llorona??

MIERCOLES. Who knows, but you better watch out, Mocososo.

DOMINGO. Don't call me Mocososo!³

In this brief exchange, offered near the beginning of the script, González sets up the humorous nature of the play and incorporates several comic Mexican American references. First is the reference to La Llorona, a ubiquitous icon in Mexican and Mexican American cultures. La Llorona is commonly employed to scare young children to go inside before dark, to go to sleep or to do chores. The threat is that if children do not behave, La Llorona will come after them. Here, González does not explain who La Llorona is. Rather, there is an expectation that the audience will get the cultural reference, just as a mainstream U.S. play may assume awareness of the Wicked Witch of the West. Here, Gruner's intellectual dimension is demonstrated as we laugh at La Llorona, therefore, making her a less scary figure.

2. Gruner, *The Game of Humor: a Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*, 93.

3. González, *Calabasas Street*, 9.

In *Humor, Literacy and Trauma*, Carl Gutiérrez-Jones also refers to La Llorona and criticizes a lack of theorizing over Chicano/a humor and the construction of a narrative and identity of Chicanos/as as a beaten people. He points to a sometimes overlooked and mistaken comedic use of La Llorona in a Sandra Cisneros' short story, "Woman Hollering Creek" and contends that Cisneros is in fact encouraging readers to reimagine the legend, suggesting that:

...the audience (may) juxtapose the reading practices of patriarchal romance with the interpretive gesture of Chicana feminist humor. These gestures help promote healing and enfranchisement, first by using laughter to foster a critical distance from one's experiences, especially those experiences that would reduce a person to a racialized body in pain, and second by facilitating community in a context otherwise defined by women's isolation from one another.⁴

Hence, Gutiérrez-Jones suggests that Cisneros, like González, employs a cultural icon in a comedic sense that might be misread by others to rather feed a narrative of the wounded Chicano/a.

Another example of Gruner's intellectual dimension can be seen in my play, *Señora Tortuga*, where humor again helps the audience deal with some of the very challenging issues in this play, such as immigration and an absent father:

BEATRIZ: I asked about your husband. Surely you have a husband.

LETICIA: He is still in Mexico, pero he'll come over later.

BEATRIZ: Hmmm...cuando es later?

LETICIA: I am not too sure; when he is able. Por favor, let's change the subject. The children will be back any moment. I don't want to upset them.

CLAUDIA: (*enters*) It's okay, 'Ama.

4. Gutiérrez-Jones, "Humor, Literacy and Trauma in Chicano Culture," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 121.

BEATRIZ: Wow! Look at all those fantabulosas flores.

PEDRO: (*Enters pulling long stalks of corn. He has not picked the corn, but pulled it from its roots.*) Fantabulosas?

LETICIA: Pedro, what did you do?

PEDRO: I picked a little corn.

LETICIA: No, Pedro, not the whole thing.⁵

Not only does Pedro's entrance with the corn stalks exemplify how humor can alleviate tension around very serious subjects and help audiences to explore realistic issues in the play from a distance, but this passage also exemplifies how Mexican American humor often pokes fun at a person who makes mistakes or does silly things, relating to Gruner's emotional aspect. Pedro is clearly not perfect, which makes him relatable and humanizes him; through a communal practice, like live theatre, Mexican American audience members are humanized collectively and communally relate to a character like Pedro.

Additionally present in the *Calabazas Street* text above is the practice of name calling, another facet of Mexican American culture. Miercoloes calls her little brother "Mocoso" (literally snotty nosed boy in English, but also commonly meaning spoiled kid or brat in Mexican American culture). This type of name calling is a cultural trademark, and it is offered to an audience who understands the practice as funny and charming. For instance, Mexican American couples frequently refer to one another as "gordo" or "fatty." When translated to English, this culturally endearing term fails to carry the same connotation of affection or intimacy and may be received as hurtful or derogatory.

While name calling is one cultural practice that González pokes fun at, another is the large and tight family structure often found in Mexican American families:

DOMINGO. There were six sisters in my family and I was the only boy. We were all named after each day of the week in Spanish. Can you imagine? There were the twins, Lunes and Martes, my older sister Miercoles, Jueves, the bookworm, Viernes, the tattletale

5. Schroeder-Arce, Roxanne, *Señora Tortuga*, 6.

and Sabado, in diapers. I was born on Sunday, so naturally I was named Domingo.⁶

González has attempted to make this humorous by giving each of the children a name of the week. Here, it is not the Spanish itself that is most funny or culturally relatable but, rather, the fact that all of the children are named a day of the week. Mexican American audience members would identify with the characteristic of large Mexican and Mexican American families, some say due to the number of Mexicans who are Catholic and, therefore, do not use birth control; others would credit strong familial bonds typically present in the culture. Whatever the reason, the idea of having so many children that you need to name them by the days of the week is culturally identifiable and humorous to those who “get it.” Here, González does help the non-Spanish speaker by clarifying that the names are the days of the week in Spanish, but the cultural knowledge is still necessary to truly understand and appreciate the humor. This further exemplifies Gruner’s social dimension—the collective understanding, relating to and laughing together about cultural references.

In the U.S., Latinos who speak Spanish are put down by mainstream society, and second- and third-generation Latinos who do not speak Spanish are equally criticized by other Latin American immigrants who do speak Spanish. In the passage above, Alicia’s limited Spanish-speaking skill is a characteristic Mexican American individuals can relate to and speaks directly to the identity struggles many Latinos, and specifically Latino youth in the U.S., currently face. By laughing at this very serious challenge, Latino audiences collectively bond and find comfort in the joke. In his book, *Punchlines*, Leon Rappoport adds:

Many accounts show that by sharing jokes that repeat or exaggerate the stereotypes used to insult them, members of ethnic groups are in effect proclaiming a sense of ethnic pride... The laughter that oppressed individuals enjoy by making ironic jokes about their situation can provide an

6. González, 9.

outlet for feelings of anger and frustration.⁷

In other words, while laughing together at Latino plays, Mexican American child and family audiences collectively heal and create defenses.

Sylvia Gonzalez S. similarly includes Mexican and Mexican American icons and references that add to the humor of her play, *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*. While the plot loosely follows that of *Alice in Wonderland*, Gonzalez S. adapts places, characters, music and food to reflect the feeling of Mexico and Mexican cultures. For example, the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* is the Day of the Dead sugar skull in *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*. The play also pokes fun at the very issue it is attempting to explore and grapple with—the search for identity among Mexican American youth:

ALICIA. You said shopping.

MOM. This is shopping, mija.

ALICIA. The mall, Mom.

MOM. (*picks up a decorative sugar skull.*) ¿A cuanto me lo dejas?

STOREKEEPER. Cuarenta.

MOM. Very expensive.

STOREKEEPER. It should be. Someone made it with their bare hands.

ALICIA. Let's go.

STOREKEEPER. Look around, young lady. Your mother has a lot of money, and I want her to leave it here.

MOM. I don't have a lot of money.

STOREKEEPER. No togues. (sic)

MOM. Don't touch, Mija.

ALICA. He told me to look around.

STOREKEEPER. Look with your eyes, not with your fingerprints.

ALICIA. (*looking at a price tag*) Ki-hoo-a-hoo-a.

MOM. What are you reading?

7. Rappoport, *Punchlines: The Case for Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Humor*, 36.

ALICIA. It says, Ki-hoo-a-hoo-a on this tag.
MOM. That's Chihuahua.⁸

Here, Gruner's third characteristic, "An emotional aspect: helping one to see oneself as one is, namely far from perfect,"⁹ is in effect as Alicia struggles with her identity throughout the play, and Gonzalez S. asks audiences to empathize with Alicia while also laughing at her character and situation. Rappoport also refers to the value of such fun-making to a cultural group: "Self-critical humor thus can serve a defensive purpose by helping to prepare group members to cope with the prejudices they are likely to encounter in the larger society."¹⁰ *Alicia in Wonder Tierra* promotes such defenses while building a sense of cohesiveness and cultural pride among Latino audiences who live in a country that is currently rejecting those attempting to emigrate to the U.S. from Latin American countries and supporting and legalizing grave public insults to recent immigrants and those suspected of immigrating illegally. For example, police in Arizona may now, by law, detain anyone they *suspect* is in the U.S. illegally.

Humor around food is often employed as an element of Gruner's social dimension and serves as a source of hilarity that unites audiences in each of the three plays. In *Señora Tortuga*, Pedro finds large tortillas in his dream. Here, the play invites the audience to laugh at the incredible significance of tortillas in the meals and lives of Mexican and Mexican American people:

(...Pedro moves downstage of platform and sees huge, oversized tortillas.)

LETICIA: (offstage as if in Pedro's dream) Do not take any of the tortillas, Pedro.

PEDRO: Wow! Look at these. Mira! These are the biggest tortillas any Mexican ever saw. Mamá, mira!¹¹

8. Gonzalez S., *Alicia in Wonder Tierra*, 5.

9. Gruner, 93.

10. Rappoport, 36.

11. Schroeder-Arce, 21.

This joke can be appreciated by all audiences, as the physical humor of seeing huge tortillas on stage is amusing and tortillas are recognizable to many people in the U.S., regardless of their cultural identity. However, the significance—as a staple Mexican American food—of huge tortillas in Pedro's dream may not be fully appreciated by non-Mexican Americans, who may not see tortillas on the table at every meal.

Calabasas Street offers a similar humorous food reference as Domingo tries to get out of going to school:

DICIEMBRE. Maybe I should call the doctor?

DOMINGO. Oh, I don't think it's that bad. Maybe I should just stay home today, huh?

DICIEMBRE. I heard there's this real bad flu from China and you get so sick you can't eat anything.

DOMINGO. Is that why children are starving in China?

DICIEMBRE. No, Mijo. Who told you that?

DOMINGO. You.

DICIEMBRE. I better get some Vicks. And I'll call your nana to make you some menudo.

DOMINGO. Menudo?! (*To audience*) I hate menudo! Cow guts! Yuck! (*to DICIEMBRE*) Ama, I don't think I should eat menudo because I think it'll make me feel worse.

DICIEMBRE. You'll have to have lots of it. Menudo for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Ay, your father is going to be so happy you're sick. He loves eating your grandmother's menudo. Well, I better call your nana.

DOMINGO. (*aside*) We should send Nana and her menudo to China. (*To DICIEMBRE*) Ama, I feel a lot better! The achy, itchy, scratchy feeling is gone! It's a miracle! It's a miracle on Calabasas Street!¹²

While Domingo's disgust at eating menudo can perhaps be seen as a negative statement about his own culture, it is also understood as

12. González, 19.

an example of Gruner's social dimension. Domingo, like many Mexican American youth, is caught between two cultures and rejects some of the aspects of his parents' cultural practices that are most highly criticized and misunderstood by dominant U.S. culture. For example, only the most authentic Mexican restaurants in the U.S. serve menudo. These restaurants are typically frequented by Mexican and Mexican American customers or more curious, daring "others." González is not intending to make a negative statement through Domingo's rejection of menudo. Rather, he means to point out how Mexican American youth are as frightened by some authentic Mexican food as non-Mexican American individuals are in the U.S.

Alicia in Wonder Tierra finds humor in reference to culturally specific foods as well, as Alicia struggles as a Mexican American adolescent, caught by and between two cultures:

ALICIA. I'm feeling funny. Now I'm suddenly being reminded of something else. Look, an oven. There in the dark.

(She walks to an oven and opens it. A GOAT HEAD is steaming in the oven.)

GOAT HEAD. Hola! Que tal! Bien. ¿Y tu?

ALICIA. No way! Papa! What is that?

(DAD enters)

DAD. Cabeza de Chivo.

ALICIA. DAD! IT'S A GOAT HEAD!

DAD. Cabeza de Chivo.

GOAT HEAD. He said, CABEZA DE CHIVO. Don't you hear well? (DAD takes a fork and plucks out one eye and eats it.)

OUCH! Como dicen aqui.

DAD. The eye is the best part. At the ranch, we fought for the eyes. Here, you have the other.

GOAT HEAD. Go ahead and take my other eye. Go ahead. I dare you. Have a blind goat on your conscience.¹³

In this dialogue, all aspects of Gruner's work are at play. The intellectual dimension is represented by a talking goat head, which pulls

13. Gonzalez S., 16.

us out of the hard reality of Alicia's rejection of her own culture due to the forces of assimilation. With regard to social dimension, Mexican Americans can collectively identify with the references to goat head and the discomfort of eating the entire head of an animal when doing so is not a mainstream practice and is, therefore, considered weird or gross; the food and practice of eating it are seen as disgusting and the people who do it may also be perceived as weird or gross. Moreover, Gruner's emotional aspect is evident as the audience can again make fun of Alicia's confusion of her own cultural identity, an experience common to many Mexican Americans who are at the convergence of two different cultures.

So who are these plays for? In productions of plays intended for adults, audience members have usually chosen to attend, whereas TYA plays are often toured to schools or children are bussed to the theatre and do not have a choice about seeing the work. Weekend shows are the exception, where adults take children to the theatre and a child may choose a particular play to attend with a willing adult. Adults often select performances that they expect to relate to. Xenophobic tendencies lead non-Latinos to avoid plays that they fear they will not understand. In the U.S., mainstream theatre companies typically present Eurocentric stories performed by white people—and tend not to produce diverse seasons. Furthermore, audiences are not being nurtured to appreciate stories of others. This is arguably the reason we have *teatros* (Latino theatres) through the U.S. Theatres explicitly dedicated to Latino stories are deemed necessary because in schools, we see far more children of color watching plays by and about white people than white children watching Latino (or other culturally specific) plays. This is due to the fact that even in TYA, the canon is inundated with Eurocentric literature. Schools are a potential point of intervention as when Mexican American themed plays are presented in schools, more non-Latinos experience them than in theatres. Whether the audience is mostly or partly filled with Latinos, Mexican Americans in audiences of culturally specific plays have an opportunity to bond. In “Humor and Competence in School-Aged Children,” Ann S. Masten elaborates on Gruner's social dimension and relates a similar sentiment directly to children:

...sexual jokes in the group of adolescent girls observed by Ransohoff (1975) served both to relieve anxieties about current developmental concerns and to enhance group cohesion. Similarly, the sharing of jokes by elementary school peers provides the pleasure of getting the joke along with the fun of sharing it with friends. Humor appreciation and creation thus can be multiply reinforced and reinforced in a social context and would be expected to enhance competence, particularly social competence.¹⁴

One conclusion that can be drawn from my study is that Mexican American children benefit from the opportunity to experience culturally specific comedy on stage, gaining considerable agency while laughing with others who “get it.” Jorge Huerta, Ph.D., professor of theatre at the University of California—San Diego, arguably the strongest advocate for Latino theatre in the USA, has articulated for decades the need for more productions of Latino plays:

The 2000 census informs us that immigrants from the south are the fastest-growing minority in the U.S. In other words, we are not going away. This poses a challenge and an opportunity to theatres and theatre departments across the country: continue to ignore these people, or include them in our seasons and our curricula.¹⁵

However, representation of Latinos in theatre is not enough; it is the quality of the representation that is critical.

Finally, bringing Mexican American cultural challenges to light through theatre in a humorous manner has many advantages, especially in this time of turmoil over immigration in the U.S. Such plays can serve to validate the culture, build community and relieve members of the

14. Masten, “Humor and Competence in School-Aged Children,” *Child Development*, 46.

15. Huerta, “The Theatre Journal Auto/Archive: Jorge Huerta, Ph.D.,” *Theatre Journal*, 761.

community of the realities of living amid such hostility. More research into the efficacy of such work is needed, but for now, the evidence suggests that we stop worrying so much about who is not “getting it,” thereby continuing to placate a majority (white) theatre audience but, rather, focus on who is. This paper concludes that Mexican American youth audiences are poised to grow in all of Gruner’s articulated dimensions: intellectually, socially and emotionally, through laughing collectively at theatre created specifically for and about them.

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