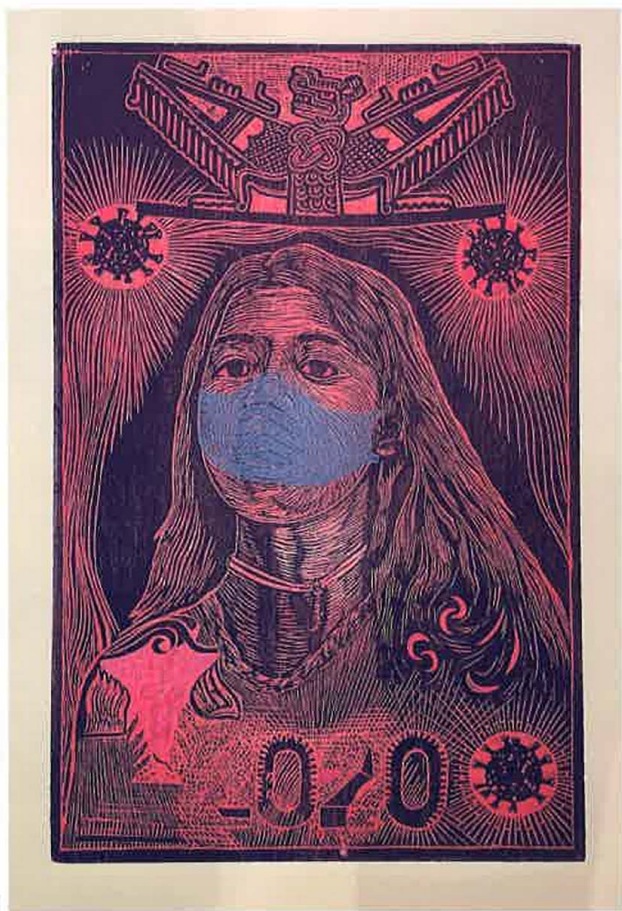


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“We’ve Lived in a Constant State of Fear”: On Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui Imperative and Undocumented Students’ Path to Conocimiento

Luis Manuel Andrade

Abstract:

In this piece, the author draws from Gloria Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui Imperative to spotlight the ways that undocumented/DACAmented community college students overcame intense, negative cognitive-emotional states—desconocimientos—when they learned about Trump’s victory by engaging in practical, immediate transformational resistance strategies (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In particular, I turned to students at a community college because these institutions have provided relief and assistance for the advancement of undocumented youth for decades (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Olivos & Mendoza, 2009; Terriquez, 2015). The three significant findings in this study were that students sought to enhance their *conocimiento* (knowledge/understanding), engaged in various nuanced protests, and sought humanization by spatially navigating to sites on campus that vitalized their revolutionary spirit and efforts to create solidarity (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015). The beauty of these transformational resistance strategies was that, altogether, they encompassed a path to *conocimiento* that enabled them to resist the anti-immigration and xenophobic sentiment by forging new networks to heal emotionally, spiritually, and collectively. The author explains the findings with the hope that educators embrace students’ transformative agency and healing during these tough political times.

Keywords: Undocumented students, Coyolxauhqui Imperative; Resistance; *Conocimiento*

I remember turning off the television, half drowsy from the wine, but mostly in shock and overwhelmed by fear of what was happening—a Coyolxauhqui state of psychic, physical, and emotional dismemberment that occurs during times of *arrebatos*, or raptures from traumatic and oppressive conditions, as Gloria Anzaldúa describes it (Anzaldúa, 2009). Anzaldúa's (2009) description of the Coyolxauhqui state in "Let Us Be the Healing Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—la sombra y el sueño" captures my reaction as Donald J. Trump was on the verge of winning the 2016 presidential election: I felt catapulted into a state of fear, feeling as if I had just been stabbed, and uncomfortable in my (un)familiar home. I felt betrayed by the colony and its promises of potential immigration reform, a woman President, and change. Broken, torn apart. "¡No puede ser, no puede ser, no puede ser!" I told myself before I turned off the television. Darkness. A whirlwind of emotions hit me. Sadness. Anxiety. I knew better than to believe that everything would be better given that liberal democratic, colonial/modern gender systems have continuously oppressed Black, Brown, and indigena peoples, but I had a slight hope—a reserved, cautious optimism. Or was it pessimism?

The next morning, the news confirmed my fears: President Barack Obama would be replaced by President Donald J. Trump and not Hillary Clinton. I fell into a state of numbness and hopelessness—a *desconocimiento*, or confused state and disorientation (Anzaldúa, 2009). I instantly became afraid for my undocumented relatives, my elderly and chronically sick grandmother, and my undocumented/DACAmented students that were in danger. During the presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016, Trump ran for president on the promises to build a wall between the United States and Mexico and intensify border patrol measures to deport undocumented citizens. In addition, he promised to eliminate President Barack Obama's 2012 Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, which served as a shield from deportation for undocumented students and offered a 2-year, renewable working permit for them to work while attending school (Krogstad, 2017b). Early data summarized that over 750,000 undocumented youth benefitted from the program by receiving work permits (Krogstad, 2017a). More updated data suggested that close to 790,000 youth received DACA permits (Krogstad, 2017b). Teaching at a community college, I had and met undocumented students that feared a Trump victory.

Out of my fear came an internal desire to talk to my students. I immediately interviewed 18 undocumented/DACAmented students within the first two weeks of President Trump's victory to understand their emotional

states and coping strategies. What I found was shocking, though unsurprising. Every single student reported feeling complex emotions, including anger, fear, and terror when they saw or heard about the outcome of the election. As one student, Daniela, described,

I went into this crisis mode, terrified! ... I was angry. I got *so* mad. I also went through the stage of feeling abandoned. I felt like so many people were hating me. And I wasn’t sure whom truly my friends were and if I was truly safe [sic]. And really having this awareness of it’s going to be real that so many people ... who voted for Trump were racist and truly against people like myself. ... I took it personal, I think, and that’s where my emotions of anger came, but it also empowered me to want to know what can we do and feeling a sense of I want to be more involved and be part of a change.

Another student, Francisco, reported not feeling surprised because of his perception of deeply ingrained racism and anti-immigration sentiment in the United States. According to Francisco, “we’ve lived in a constant state of fear.” The negative feelings recurred, though I quickly learned that students participated in practical, immediate transformational resistance strategies to cope (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

In the remainder of this essay, I draw from Gloria Anzaldúa’s theorization about the Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative to spotlight the ways that undocumented/DACAmented community college students overcame intense, negative cognitive/emotional states—*desconocimientos*—when they learned about Trump’s victory. Inspired by Anzaldúa’s theorizations of the Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative, the three significant findings in this study are that students sought to enhance their *conocimiento* (knowledge/understanding), engaged in various nuanced protests, and sought humanization by spatially navigating to sites on campus that vitalized their revolutionary spirit and efforts to create solidarity (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015). The beauty of these transformational resistance strategies was that, altogether, they encompassed a path to *conocimiento* that enabled them to resist the status quo by forging new networks to heal emotionally and collectively. The essay is divided into several parts. First, I provide additional context for the political landscape of the present study and a review of literature, including Anzaldúa’s Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative, writings within my field of study, Communication Studies, as well as interdisciplinary research related to undocumented/DACAmented students. Secondly, I explain the methodology and use of qualitative interviews. Lastly,

I explain and discuss the findings and propose practical recommendations with the hope that educators and others embrace students' transformative agency and healing during tough political times.

The Anti-Immigration Landscape of 2015-2016 & Anzaldúa's Coyolxauhqui State

During his presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016, Donald J. Trump promoted strict and oppressive immigration policies. In his presidential announcement speech on June 16, 2015, Trump famously declared, "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Lee, 2015). This early communiqué foreshadowed his later xenophobic comments and policies. Later in 2015 and in early 2016, Trump remarked that he would bar Muslims from entering the country because he viewed them as threats to the United States (Cineas, 2021). In other campaign speeches, Trump promised to enact several policies, including laws to: deport current and future undocumented people; block or prevent pathways to residency or citizenship; change processes for legal entry to make them stricter; prosecute criminals and those that overstayed their visas; and strengthen border patrol (Zurcher, 2016). Consequently, Trump's anti-immigration messages motivated hate groups and others to engage in political violence targeting minoritized groups, including undocumented people. Although Trump consistently expressed anti-immigration messages, his stance on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy shifted. For example, early in his campaign, Trump told supporters that he would eliminate the DACA policy if he won. A month after his presidential victory, he announced that he would work with Congressional representatives to protect undocumented students, but later recanted this view and, in September, 2017, Jeff Sessions formally announced that the administration would eliminate the program altogether by early 2018 (Wise, 2018). In early 2018, President Trump announced that he was willing to grant a path to citizenship to undocumented students only if Congress fully funded the border wall between the United States and Mexico (Wise, 2018). Although the DACA program was not fully eliminated, the president pressed on with deportations and separation of families at the border in mid-2018 (Meckler, 2018).

President Trump’s promises, increasing public anti-immigrant sentiment, and the shifting threats against DACA intensified the negative cognitive/emotional state of students; this state was aptly described by Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, 2009, 2015, 2019) when she theorized about the Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative—a transitory process from fear, numbness and hopelessness, which is initially traumatic, to eventual empowerment and growth. Anzaldúa draws from the Aztec myth of Coyolxauhqui to explain the concept. In the myth, the moon goddess of light, Coyolxauhqui, was dismembered by her brother, the Aztec god of war. Out of defiance, the goddess searched for and found her scattered body pieces, re-pieced herself, and spatially moved to the heavens to provide light to the Earth. By means of analogy, Anzaldúa illustrates that since the times of colonization, colonizers have dismembered the language, traditions, cultures, and bodies of indigenous, Black, and queers, too (Anzaldúa, 2007). Anzaldúa states,

Chaotic disruptions, violence, and death catapult us into the Coyolxauhqui state of dissociation and fragmentation that characterizes our times. Our collective shadow—made up of the destructive aspects, psychic wounds, and splits in our own culture—is aroused and we are forced to confront it. In trying to make sense of what’s happening, some of us come into deep awareness (conocimiento) of political and spiritual situations and the unconscious mechanisms that abet hate, intolerance, and discord. This searching, inquiring, and healing consciousness is conocimiento. (p. 311)

And, just like the goddess, colonized subjects have sought to piece their bodies together as a form of resistance against their oppressors (Anzaldúa, 1999). Hence, the Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative is a life-affirming philosophy because woundedness (being ripped open) can begin a transformative power to empowerment (repairing wounds).

In “Let Us Be the Healing Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—la sombra y el sueño,” Anzaldúa (2009) likened the deity’s experience to the lived realities of people that were and have been persecuted by state apparatuses after the attacks on September 11, 2001. After the attacks, President George W. Bush declared a War on Terror, which turned to national paranoia and fear of migrants and people of color. Consequently, political, economic, educational, and religious institutions turned into oppressive institutions that at once demonized colonized subjects, as well as catapulted them into shock, confusion, and disjointedness. According to the author, “for women of color,

home and homeland have not been safe places—our bodies are constantly targeted, trespassed, and violated. Poor white women and young Black and Latino men have never been safe in this country—a country that internally colonizes people of color, enforces domestication of women through violence, and continues the slow genocide of Native Americans” (p. 308). We still live in terror since anti-immigration policies are pieces of the same colonialist puzzle that re-open metaphorical and physical “open wounds” that numb us, cause *desconocimiento* and immobility, but provide an opportunity for personal and collective change (p. 304). From inner chaos, emotional instability, and confusion that emerges in an increasingly anti-immigration environment, a bodily and psychical ability to resist passivity and seek affective connections—often spiritually driven—takes root to repair “el daño” caused by the state and the aggressors that produce harm (p. 312). In her case, for example, Anzaldúa found solace in piecing together her *historia* and (re)telling her experiences in her writings as a matter of resisting Western academic, political, cultural, and familial institutions.

Various Communication Studies scholars have turned to Anzaldúa’s works and philosophy to inform their scholarship (Calafell, 2007; Gonzalez, Calafell, & Avant-Mier, 2014; Gutierrez, 2012; Moreman & Calafell, 2008). The primary reason why scholars turn to Anzaldúa’s works is because her philosophies reflect the liminal conditions of Latina/o/xs and colonial subjects living in modern colonial borderlands. As pioneers, such as Calafell (2004, 2005, 2007), Delgado (1995, 1998a, 1998b), Flores (1996, 2003), Holling (2006), Moreman (1999, 2008) and others, sought to carve spaces in Communication Studies to question the predominantly White and Eurocentric paradigms, new philosophies, including Anzaldúa’s onto-epistemological theories, added to our understanding of shifting Latina/o/x identity, performance, and feminisms (Calafell, 2007). Out of the need to challenge Eurocentric modalities, new investigations into the survival strategies of Latina/o/xs, Black women, and other minoritized groups became important to academically and praxially challenge colonial/modern gender systems of oppression (Chávez, 2015). Additionally, Flores (1996, 2003) investigated the history and emergence of Chicana/Latinx feminisms, including Anzaldúa’s works, to show their purpose to resist and challenge sexism, colonialism, racism, and homophobia in the Chicano movement and national culture writ large.

Only a few Communication Studies scholars have theorized about the Coyolxauhqui Imperative (Garza, 2011; Gutierrez, 2012). Garza (2011) provides an extensive analysis of the myth of Coyolxauhqui and the

multiple interpretations of the legend. Importantly, the author recognizes that contemporary scholars and people view Coyolxauhqui in both positive and negative terms—either as a negative, defiant goddess or a positive, empowering deity. Garza views the story of Coyolxauhqui as largely positive, a model for empowerment, and what the author refers to as a “pursuit of vocality” to become empowered (p. 50). In his work about gay marriage, Gutierrez (2012) described the Coyolxauhqui Imperative as a “process of identity negotiation with larger cultural-structural systems” (p. 43). Moreover, although endless research has traced shifting anti-immigration, xenophobic, nativist, and exclusionary tropes and discourse, especially against undocumented youth (Anguiano & Chávez, 2011; Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015; Chávez, 2007, 2008; Ngai, 2004), and studies have long studied the emergence and importance of immigrant and Latina/o/x vernacular rhetoric that resists and challenges hegemonic anti-immigration narratives (Calafell & Delgado, 2004; Holling, 2006; Negrón-Gonzales, 2013; Ono & Sloop, 2002), more research is needed about the experiences of undocumented youth in the contemporary moment (Anguiano & Chávez, 2011). Hence, this study is unique in its approach and scope because it applies the Coyolxauhqui Imperative to the phenomenal experiences of undocumented students at a community college immediately after Trump’s presidential victory and seeks to understand the particularity of their transformational resistance strategies.

Relevant Research About Undocumented Students

Scholars in the fields of education, ethnic studies, and closely related fields have studied the experiences of undocumented students extensively. Different findings pertinent to this study exist.

Socioemotional Development

The socioemotional development of undocumented students is complex and unlike other students. Socioemotional development refers to the ways that students negotiate their identities and evolve emotionally in relationship to their environments and social relationships (Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). Unlike documented students, undocumented students have added stressors, including familial obligations, extracurricular obligations, and the pressures of being undocumented. In fact, researchers described a “triple minority status” in undocumented students because of their intersecting economic difficulties, acculturation issues related to their

ethnicities and races, and undocumented status (Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010, p. 39). Related to the study of socioemotional development, researchers found that undocumented students faced chronic stress (Adames, 2017) and intense anxiety, as well as a lack of sense of belonging, due to oppressive anti-immigration laws and xenophobia (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Similarly, Santos and Menjivar (2013) found that students developed negative self-esteem and well-being because of the multifaceted stressors they faced.

Distorted Identity

Gonzales et al. (2013) found that undocumented students developed a *distorted identity*, which negatively affected their psychological well-being, as well as the ways they formed relationships in their environments. Simply put, undocumented students, particularly those that were brought to the United States at an early age, became hyper-aware of laws, policies, and campaigns that viewed them as criminals or threats. Continual negative messages about undocumented students propelled them to internalize such messages. Similarly, Santos and Menjivar (2013) found that students struggled between identifying as American or not, a process that negatively affected their sense of self. Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, and Coronado (2010) explained that undocumented students struggled between (non)belonging to the nation, their communities, and countries of origins; the sense of (non)belonging pushed them to feel shame and hopelessness.

Hostile Environments and Discrimination

Consistently, researchers found that undocumented students viewed their environments (local and national) as hostile and discriminatory. They viewed their environments as hostile and discriminatory because national laws and politicians often depicted them as criminals (Annamma, 2013). Moreover, undocumented youth, including students, believed that institutions viewed them as undeserving or inferior (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015). Consequently, because undocumented youth learned about discrimination and perceived negative nativism against their status from a very young age (Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010), they were most likely to reduce their participation and involvement in their communities, including school (Santos & Menjivar, 2013). As an example, Jiménez-Silva, Cheatham, and Gomez (2013) found that students were less likely to seek academic support or medical attention after Arizona passed the SB 1070 anti-immigration law. Interestingly,

Rodríguez (2011) found that undocumented students “maintained a strong cultural identity even when faced by the dominant American narrative projected by their Latina/o documented peers” (p. 11). In all, undocumented youth were incredibly aware of hostility and discrimination in their surroundings, which negatively affected their cognitive/emotional states.

Summary of the Literature: Piecing it all Together

Under the assumption that undocumented students embodied similar fragmented states as Coyolxauhqui’s after Trump’s presidential victory, especially as evidenced by my interviews and preexisting interdisciplinary research, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the ways that undocumented/DACAmented community college students overcame negative cognitive/emotional states. The next sections explain the methodology and important findings that show the empowering elements of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative as exemplified by the experiences of undocumented students.

Methodology

As part of a larger study, I interviewed 18 students to understand their emotional reactions and resistance strategies after Trump’s presidential victory. I received expedited IRB approval within the first two weeks of his victory because the committee saw urgency in my approach. I used qualitative interviews with open-ended questions that lasted between 45-60 minutes. Qualitative interviews are frequently used in educational settings to understand the lived realities, perceptions, and experiences of students (Cresswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I used a similar approach as Anguiano and Gutiérrez Nájera (2015) who found that qualitative interviews were appropriate when reaching out to undocumented youth. Similar to the authors, I used a snowball sampling technique to recruit students; I first emailed my classes to solicit participation and then asked participants to ask other undocumented students to partake in the study. I later transcribed the interviews to identify emergent themes.

Sample

My focus on undocumented students at a community college was intentional. I turned to students at a community college because these institutions have provided relief and assistance for the advancement of undocumented

youth for decades (Diaz-Strong & Meiners, 2007; Olivos & Mendoza, 2009; Terriquez, 2015). Accurate and precise data about undocumented student enrollment in college is often lacking because students do not openly disclose their status (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015), but “given cost constraints, a majority of undocumented students who do complete high school attend lower-cost community colleges, which often have lower completion rates than four-year public colleges” (Flores, 2015, para. 5). Researchers go as far as suggesting that community colleges are a “gateway into higher education,” while also being “at the forefront in promoting increased educational access and attainment for undocumented youth” (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2012, p. 1-3). Additional data indicated, “between 200,000 and 225,000 undocumented immigrants enrolled in college. But research on the population is limited largely to students at selective four-year colleges or within specific states” (Mulhere, 2015, para. 6). Therefore, the setting for the study provided unique importance.

Table 1 lists the total participants in the present study. Although I gave them the option to self-identify as female, male, or other, the sample included 8 self-identified females and 10 self-identified males, primarily between the ages of 18-22. Most students were born in Mexico and self-identified as Hispanic/Latina/o. I used pseudonyms to protect participants’ identities.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonym	Gender*	Age	Country of Origin	Ethnicity
Ignacia	Female	18-22	Mexico	Hispanic/Latina
Diana	Female	18-22	Mexico	Hispanic/Latina
Luz	Female	18-22	Mexico	Hispanic/Latina
Luisa	Female	33+	Mexico	Mexican American
Daniela	Female	18-22	El Salvador	Hispanic/Latina
Guadalupe	Female	18-22	El Salvador	Hispanic/Latina
Rocio	Female	18-22	Mongolia	Asian American
Alexandria	Female	18-22	Not specified	Hispanic/Latina
Marcos	Male	18-22	Mexico	Hispanic/Latino
Salvador	Male	18-22	Mexico	Mexican
Francisco	Male	18-22	Mexico	Mexican
Hector	Male	23-27	Mexico	Hispanic/Latino
Martin	Male	23-27	Mexico	Hispanic/Latino
Angel	Male	23-27	Mexico	Hispanic/Latino
Miguel	Male	23-27	Mexico	Chicano
Manuel	Male	23-27	Mexico	Mexican
Ivan	Male	18-22	Peru	Hispanic/Latino
Rodrigo	Male	18-22	China	Asian

*Students were given the option to identify as female, male, or other.

Thematic Analysis

I followed Owen’s (1984) recommendations for thematic analysis. According to the researcher, themes may emerge from repeated phrases, recurrent explanations, or forcefulness in the emphasis of certain words or phrases. I identified the prevalent emerging themes by looking for repetition, recurrence, or forcefulness in participants’ descriptions and responses.

Findings & Discussion

This section describes and analyzes the significance of students’ transformational resistance strategies that forged new paths of *conocimiento* and empowerment. The students sought to invigorate new *conocimiento* (knowledge/understanding), engaged in various nuanced protests, and sought humanization by spatially navigating to sites on campus that vitalized their

revolutionary spirit and efforts to create solidarity. Altogether, the strategies reveal the power and process of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative.

Invigorating New Conocimiento (Knowledge/Understanding)

One predominant response to Trump's victory and the resultant emotional stress was to invigorate new conocimiento, or knowledge and understanding, by staying informed and educated. In fact, in one way or another, the majority of students, except 3, indicated that they sought to become more informed about history, immigration, and Trump's anti-immigration plans.

Several students recalled wanting to become more informed about the law and the history of immigration, particularly of Latina/o/xs. For example, Hector described a newfound purpose to "stay informed." He delved into studying the process of checks and balances and the Constitution. Salvador stated, "[I] read about different times in history. Read about the Holocaust and the Jews and what they did. I found motivation through history." Similarly, Francisco revisited the readings from Sociology, Women's Studies, and Philosophy that explained the history of anti-immigration campaigns, white supremacy, and xenophobia against immigrants in the United States. According to Francisco, history taught him that many people in the United States have "internalized hate" which is the reason why "Brown/black people get killed all the time." He added,

The undocumented experience is one of feeling dehumanized. ... I know that I can't vote and that my voice doesn't matter. This is also true when you are around places like school. I mean, here, all these people have this privilege to vote or getting out of the country because Trump is President, but what about us? Teachers can have a choice to take a stance, and... I've noticed a lot of teachers legitimize white supremacy. Just the US education in general.

Students found solace in learning about the law, immigration, and Latina/o/x histories and experiences and, while some had some exposure to courses that teach critical histories, others sought new conocimiento on their own.

Other students recalled wanting to become more informed about Trump's policies. In fact, every single student remembered following the election campaign and news, perhaps because their entire educational careers and lives were at stake. In addition, the news and social media were saturated with information about Trump's victory and his concurrent plans on

immigration. Daniela explained her purpose to “informarme más,” (inform myself more) to “seguir a Trump, aprender de lo que hará” (Follow Trump to learn what he will do). She added that it was incredibly important to track Trump’s moves; as a result, she consulted lawyers on the most precise ways to protect her family and herself from deportation. As was the case with most students, Manuel described feeling hopeless: “those days were hard. What do you do when you are thinking too much about what can happen to your future and keep taking work and employment seriously?” One way of coping with frustration and powerlessness was to follow Trump’s plans. Manuel explained, “I research to know what is going on and stay up with the news. I need to be informed to be more prepared.” Students actively learned about Trump’s policies and actions to be proactive and prepare for their futures.

One consequence of learning about history and Trump’s plans was that students recognized the parallels between undocumented students’ struggles and the struggles of other groups, including Black communities, Muslims, and queers. For example, Ivan declared,

When I heard that Trump won, I [didn’t] agree with the things he said, sexist, racist, bigotry and him empowering white supremacists and neo-Nazis [sic]. ... There’s a lot of people that are scared, they don’t know what they are going to do. Latinos, Muslims.

Angel, a self-proclaimed organizer, activist, and campus leader indicated that he worked closely with several on-campus groups, including clubs that solely focused on helping undocumented students, Latina/o/xs, Black students, and veterans respectively, because their needs were interconnected and overlapped. He specified that the campus needed a space where these different groups could coalesce to resist Trump’s policies and hateful speech. Francisco, the student who revisited readings from his courses and spotlighted the historical violence against Brown and Black communities, discussed his involvement in several organizations, including the Brown Liberation movement, the Queer-Straight Alliance, and the Brown Berets, which is an organization that dates back to the student protests against the Vietnam War, police brutality, and anti-immigration policies from the 1960s to the 1990s. Francisco elaborated that he participated in various organizations because he deeply believed in building coalitions to combat oppression and white supremacy.

Importantly, a few students refused to follow the news and Trump's plans. For instance, Martin explained,

Honestly, for a few days, it was just completely blocked. I stopped watching news. I used to watch political commentators. I focused on my projects, working, working on future projects, and focused on my personal career. Stopped paying attention to the cabinet members. I really just made myself feel better by not paying attention and only focusing on my own responsibilities for a few days.

Martin used the phrase "cabinet members" to refer to President Trump's administration. Moreover, Rodrigo specified that he stopped following the news and turned to "Video games in general [to help] me cope. Playing with friends relieve[d] me." Angel, too, spent time with family, instead of following news about Trump's policies. Angel stated, "I [spent time] with my family and didn't talk about anything, but us. We didn't talk about the elections for a period. We just were happy that we were together." Anxiety and fear were perhaps the main reasons why some students did not want to follow the news; joy and happiness of being with family and others provided some comfort in light of the traumatic outcome to the presidential election.

Similar to Coyolxauhqui's search for her body parts to re-piece herself together as tactic of resistance against her brother, the desire to invigorate new *conocimiento* was empowering for students as it helped them cognitively and emotionally cope with their fears and shock. Several scholars have found similar trends; undocumented students often delve into active learning strategies and go out of their way to study and succeed in spite of, to counteract, or escape from stressors (Contreras, 2009; Pérez, 2009; Pérez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortés, 2009; Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010). Contreras (2009) added that students were "determined, hard-working, engaged, and optimistic despite the additional layer of fear and anxiety they experience due to their legal status" (p. 628). Unfortunately, the strategy of becoming more educated comes at a risk because it perpetuates risky ideologies, such as the beliefs that students should be "exceptional" to prove that they deserve inclusion into elitist educational institutions (Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera, 2015, p. 46). According to Anguiano & Gutiérrez Nájera (2015), a dangerous dichotomy arises between good/bad immigrants when students distinguish themselves as deserving and highly educated, in contrast to undeserving students. Additional researchers have shown that coalitional movements often reinforce logics, such as the good/bad immigrant dichotomy, that create splits, fragmentation,

and exclusionary behaviors internally (Ono & Sloop, 1997; Holling, 2007). Fortunately, the present study revealed that undocumented students did not seek new *conocimiento* to show exceptionalism or deservingness to the state, schools, or professors. On the contrary, students sought new *conocimiento* as a precautionary measure against Trump’s anti-immigration policies to be proactive and to create coalitions with other students, allies, and movements, such as the Black Lives Matter, Brown Liberation, and queer movements. Students used precise knowledge and new understandings to remain one step ahead of Trump’s policies and to protect themselves and their families.

Participating in Various Nuanced Protests

Another predominant theme was the engagement in various nuanced protests. The protests were nuanced because, although they principally happened in school and in surrounding communities, students perceived these as important to release anger, connect with others, and heal. Additionally, students described protests as intersectional and part of larger coalitions and networks. Protesting, then, became a new way to forge *conocimiento* for empowerment.

Students participated in protests to release anger. Daniela, Luisa, Martin, Ivan, and Francisco specifically described anger when they heard about Trump’s victory. As examples, Martin stated that he felt “shocked and angry and concerned, but mostly shock and anger” and Ivan did not hesitate to explain that he felt “anger at his appointments and who he is putting in office.” As explained in the previous section, Martin turned inward by focusing on school and his own projects, but Luisa, Ivan, and Francisco turned to protesting. Luisa stated, “I participated in the rally and went to various protests,” and Ivan illustrated, “I participated in a small protest at [the school]. There was a protest in downtown LA. I was there.” Moreover, Francisco was more precise about the protests he participated in:

Healing circle with the Brown Berets. In houses, backyards, talked about marches to let out our anger. After, we participated in marches and created spaces with people that are like-minded.

Although Miguel initially did not report anger, he was explicit in stating that his main coping mechanism was “Protest. You know, that was how I let my anger out. Chanting and seeing the students together. Writing music. Talking

to my club members about different things that we have accomplished.” In all, students were angry and they protested to express their frustrations.

Students also participated in protests to feel connected with other students in similar situations or allies. Angel’s experience is telling. When he heard that Trump won the election, he described feeling “just numb, discouraged.” The protests at school the next day were important to feel emotionally connected. Angel explained,

But then the morning after we had a protest, more of a demonstration, and students marched around the campus. That brought out a lot of emotion. That was very empowering. ... During the protest, I turned to a few of us that were all did not have to say anything to each other, but gave each other a hug. We knew what was going on and the consequences this might bring.

Similarly, Guadalupe explained, “I came to the school and saw protests on campus. This told me we are not alone, all across the country. This made me realize not everyone agrees with Trump.” Another way that students felt connected was by seeking help at protests or joining clubs on campus that participated in protests. For instance, Daniela indicated that she actively sought protests to “look for what can help us.” She specified that she looked for any advice or legal assistance to safeguard her academic career. Miguel, a “founder of Homeboys and Homegirls, [and] a commissioner for student government,” organized “active protests or leadership workshops” on campus. Miguel was also part of an academic club that principally focused on helping undocumented students on campus. As part of the club, Miguel collaborated with other students to announce protests on campus and in nearby communities. In addition, the club provided resources and flyers for legal and financial aid services offered by the school or local organizations. The advisors of the club, two full-time faculty members, helped Miguel and other students organize a walk-out and protest on campus the day after Trump’s victory. Whether students sought or created protest opportunities, connecting with others became a root for empowerment.

Additionally, students described protests as important sites to heal. For example, Diana explained that “We had a healing circle at school. Everyone shar[ed] emotions. I started crying. I haven’t cried since. With my club, we organized and had a healing space.” Diana described a positive, healing process after she channeled her sadness and frustration “to organize” and it was “beautiful to see that.” Previously, Francisco specified that he participated

in a healing circle as part of the Brown Berets organization. He viewed this as an opportunity to “let out anger” because “we need more spaces for people to talk and mourning is valid because people are scared.” Finally, Rocio illustrated, “I ... attended rallies and shared my feelings on Facebook in hopes that maybe my small platform and voice would cause enough social change.” Rocio indicated that reaching out to others during protests and through social media helped her overcome grief and terror after Trump’s victory. Protests and community organizing, then, allowed students to initially confront and release negative cognitive/emotional states as a mechanism to shift toward self- and collective healing.

Similar to Coyolxauhqui’s decision to inhabit the heavens to bring her fierce light to Earth, students moved from new *conocimiento* to protest that was fundamentally empowering. Whereas studies have shown that undocumented students often feel shame, fear, and hopelessness that discourages them from participation in communities and school (Santos & Menjivar, 2013), the present study revealed that they increased their participation as long as it fomented protest and demands for change. In fact, the desire to protest was in many ways sparked by learning about laws, immigration, and history, and, consequently, this activism helped students productively release anger, seek connections with others, and to ultimately heal. This productive move from *conocimiento* to personal and structural and material transformation was best theorized by Freire (2000) and hooks (1994) when they illustrated that the necessary first step in any revolutionary struggle was to learn about history and resistance, particularly the knowledge that sparks organic energy to protest. In addition, students that participated in healing circles/talks recurrently illustrated that they cried, embraced each other, and shared mutual appreciation. These mundane performances revitalized their spirits. Anzaldúa (2002) saw these bodily processes as “inner work” that encompass self-reflection, compassion and tending to wounds. These performances are personal, yet necessary acts of self-empowerment that may translate to collective transformation. Moreover, Andrade and Gutierrez-Perez (2017) found that the embrace of differences, particularly across activist lines, was important to create individual and collective healing; the authors urged contemporary movements to embrace activism that collectively fights different oppressive systems, for the struggles of Latina/o/xs are interconnected with the struggles of other diverse marginalized groups and vice versa. hooks (1994) particularly emphasized that educators can foment productive revolutionary energies in classrooms by allowing students to learn from historical revolutionary movements to transform theory into transformative practice.

We have seen this revolutionary and protest energy before. For example, Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) studied the Chicana and Chicano student movements of the 1960s and 1990s and found that students combined personal transformation with structural change. The students organized walk outs and used protests to challenge segregation and discriminatory school policies. Like the aforementioned movements, the protests in the present study are similar in that students engaged in protest for emotional catharsis, a deep physical and mindful means of activating agency, as did Coyolxauhqui in the face of her brother's oppressive dominion (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2007). The students' transformative resistance strategies were ephemeral because they occurred in precise and spontaneous moments, but provided positive affective relationships in immediate contexts that challenged exclusionary statist logics, including Trump's anti-immigration stances and discourses against other minoritized groups (Ono & Sloop, 2002). While researchers have shown that past coalitional movements reinforced logics of exclusion (un)intentionally (Ono & Sloop, 1997; Holling, 2007), the present study revealed that undocumented/DACAmented students offered a type of *conocimiento* and a path that shows temporal glimpses of hope in new relational-building that is continually reflective and resistant of exclusion. Students were willing to risk everything, including deportation at school or outside, to protest *with others*, especially those that were similarly targeted by President Trump.

Searching for Safe Spaces

One last recurrent response was the identification of safe spaces on campus that affirmed students' identities and revolutionary energies. The identification of safe spaces, including clubs and the library, was another way that students created *spatial* *conocimientos* for empowerment. Importantly, whereas some students found safe spaces, others did not see their campuses as safe.

Clubs. Eleven students identified student clubs as safe spaces. Ten of those students specifically named two programs that were exclusively designed to help undocumented (Club A) and Latina/o/x (Club B) students. Repeatedly, students felt safe because advisors in both, Club A and Club B, actively listened and assisted them in these spaces. For example, when describing Club A, Alexandria explained, "In these spaces, I am able to talk about my status without being afraid that I will be judged in a negative way." In describing Club B, Hector described, "I would consider the [Club B] location, the counseling complex, a safe space for undocumented students. I feel very safe with the

people there, and maybe the fact that a lot of the people in there are [Latina/o/xs]. It makes me feel more connected to them, more relax, and open to talking with them.” Martin pinpointed a film club as the place where he could talk to his peers and advisor without feeling ashamed of his undocumented status. Students felt safe in clubs because of the advisors, company, and the physical sites that shielded them from the sociopolitical horrors outside.

Library. Four students identified the library as a safe space. For example, Savador explained that the library is

Somewhere I can go if I feel in danger. If there were task forces or ICE operatives raiding families, [the library is] somewhere these people couldn’t reach me. Education has always been a haven for me to get away from problems. I don’t want that to change because of my status.

Similarly, Ivan stated, “The library. It’s a very peaceful place. ... In class, there is more division. You never know what can happen in a class. The day after the election, I was scared of coming to class because I saw people with the ‘Make America Great Again’ hat.” In Ivan’s case, he preferred the library because classrooms did not appear safe. Echoing Ivan’s sentiment, Manuel painted a grim picture of educators in classrooms. He stated,

For teachers, I notice that some of them don’t care or they pretend not to care. I don’t know why. We are in a pretty serious situation and I was surprised that my three teachers didn’t say anything. So, I feel that they need to be a little more open. Also, they should know what is the situation with undocumented students [sic].

The library, a quiet and isolated place, provided safety when students felt that the campus grounds and classrooms were threatening. The students also perceived the library as a place of respite from border patrol or the commentary and anti-immigration and xenophobic ideologies of peers or faculty.

None. Three students disclosed that they could not recall any safe spaces on campus. Rodrigo explained,

I think that safe spaces are a great idea. But I also think that people would be susceptible to being targeted. I feel like a safe space would be good and allow people to express their ideas and feelings. I personally would not go to these ‘safe’ spaces.

Francisco described that he did not feel safe on campus and explained a general criticism of the educational system. Francisco accused educators of “legitimizing white supremacy” because they failed to listen to students’ needs, including “white teachers who follow a colonizing model.” He added that “privileged professors don’t go through the experiences [of marginalized students]. We have students who know what it is to go through struggle, but they don’t listen and try to discredit spaces for students of color without white students. White voices, male voices are prioritized.” Francisco proceeded to explain that he preferred “to build alliances outside of school with marginalized communities that are living in fear.” Unfortunately, Francisco left the campus and discontinued his education the semester after Trump won the presidential election. The students that did not identify any safe spaces on campus described educational institutions as white, colonialist sites and perhaps did not find safety and protection on campus because they preferred to fight bigger battles outside of school.

Similar to Coyolxauhqui’s transit to the heavens, students demonstrated a spatial awareness (Andrade, 2017a) of certain safe spaces on campus that helped them feel validated and empowered. In these environments, students identified other students, allies, and advisors that were willing to protect undocumented students, as well as engage in protest activities. Identifying clubs and student organizations, as well as the library, was an incredibly significant finding because it suggests that students navigate the campus environment as a mindful revolutionary practice; in other words, they are incredibly aware of spaces where they can kindle their cultural identities or revolutionary spirits. Seeking other students and allies in safe spaces shows that students stick together, particularly with those that share similar backgrounds and energy for transformation. In another study (Andrade, 2017a), I found that students, including undocumented students, strategically navigated to certain spaces on campus to socially or academically integrate into. Students were likely to visit these spaces to form strong bonds with other Latina/o/xs or because these sites helped them advance in their careers. Similarly, Anguiano and Gutiérrez Nájera (2015) previously identified that undocumented “youth create spaces” to survive in higher education (p. 53). The present study extended Andrade’s and Anguiano and Gutiérrez Nájera’s works by precisely identifying the geographical terrains that students view as safe and potentially revolutionary. These spaces are important for students to resist xenophobia and other systems of oppression.

The discovery of unsafe spaces, including certain classrooms where they felt persecuted, is important because, just like Coyolxauhqui’s recognition that proximity to her brother was dangerous, survival necessitates knowing where to enter or avoid. In another study (Andrade, 2017b), I found that educators exercised condescending classroom practices, including the use of the term “illegal,” insensitivity to the experiences of undocumented students, or the use of curriculum that otherized immigrants. A lack of safe spaces is concerning because community colleges are undocumented students’ frequent “first response system for any kind of social, medical, or psychological problem or disability” (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 86). Undocumented students attend community colleges more than they attend universities because these institutions are affordable and allow them to live in proximate distance to their families (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2012). Consequently, a lack of safe spaces on campus may suggest that Anzaldúa (2009) was right all along—there are no safe spaces that we may consider home within colonial landscapes and terrains. Therefore, it is imperative that institutions and faculty learn more about undocumented students and their complex, shifting identities, as well as transform the classroom and campus environments into invitational sites. Affirming the complex identities and revolutionary spirits and demands of undocumented students is urgent and vital as students seek new paths of *conocimiento* and re-piecing, as did Coyolxauhqui.

Conclusion

“Out of poverty, poetry;
out of suffering, song.”

--a Mexican saying
(Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 87)

The stanzas that begin this section capture the spirit of undocumented students that struggled through anger, fear, and shock—*desconocimientos* and suffering in the Coyolxauhqui state that then create new modes of empowerment and *conocimientos*—the poetry and song of the Coyolxauhqui Imperative. Unsurprisingly, during interviews, every student revealed extreme, negative cognitive/emotional states, and they feared for their livelihoods, families, and academic trajectories after Trump’s presidential victory in 2016. They feared Trump’s victory because of his promises to eliminate Barack Obama’s DACA program, intensify border security, and increase deportations. Researchers have shown that undocumented students frequently face chronic stress that is

magnified during crisis periods, such as Trump's presidential victory (Adames, 2017), though these states of fear and anxiety date back to the violent times of colonization (Anzaldúa, 1999, 2009, 2015). Constant criminalization and negative media coverage expound on students' negative cognitive/emotional states, as well. Fortunately, the present study revealed that students actively invigorated new *conocimientos*, engaged in nuanced protests, and located safe spaces as modes of empowerment. These active and mindful empowerment strategies exemplified Anzaldúa's recommendations to re-piece ourselves to reconstruct our energies toward the path of humanization in the face of oppression. The students' empowerment was incredibly intentional and transcended mere vocal empowerment (Garza, 2015) to challenge structural anti-immigration ideology (Gutierrez, 2012) in profound, new ways that educators and others should be attuned to.

Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999, 2009, 2015) *Coyolxauhqui Imperative* is a life-affirming philosophy that shows a productive process and transformation from fear and shock to empowerment and personal/communal restoration. In "Let Us Be the Healing Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative—la sombra y el sueño," Anzaldúa (2009) predicted our current political times because the War on Terror after September 11, 2001 intensified domestic wars against persons of color, queers, and immigrants. However, she demanded that in the face of intensified surveillance, persecution, and militarism, colonized subjects must find ways to heal and reconstruct their psychic and material bodies to resist oppression. Undocumented students in the present study did just that! The undocumented students I interviewed embarked on a transformational journey from living in a state of fear and shock after Trump's presidential victory to empowerment through finding new *conocimientos*, protests, and on campus safe spaces. In many ways, the students embodied the practical elements of the Coyolxauhqui state/Imperative. In these students' experiences, we see varying strategies, ranging from finding vocalized empowerment (Garza, 2011) to creating protests to challenge anti-immigration, xenophobic structures (Gutierrez, 2012).

The present study has several limitations that future studies should address. First, the present study focused solely on the perceptions of students and their resistances after the first two weeks of Trump's presidential victory. Future scholars should map students' transformational resistance strategies across a longer time period, as well as include larger and more diverse samples. Secondly, students in this study predominantly self-identified as *Hiapnic/Latina/o* and/or Mexican; therefore, precise attention should be given to other

immigrant groups, including undocumented students from Africa and Asia that are often overlooked in discussions about immigration (Starr, 2017). The enduring purposes of future studies should be to document their experiences to avoid obfuscating these vital histories and to spotlight the ways that students move from woundedness to empowerment—the Coyolxauhqui Imperative—in the face of ongoing ideological and material violence.

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MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan

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Abstract:

“MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan” is made in the effort to rectify a void within academic research in the Midwest region of the United States regarding Chicanx Studies. This collaboration includes photography and bilingual ethno-poetry as well as an explanatory narrative juxtaposing these two unique creative forms.

Querencia concerns the idea of ‘Place-making’, identity, and cultural practice. In the American Southwest, *querencia* takes on a *mestizaje* intersectionality. Similar to the Chicanx concept of *Aztlán*, the sacred place of origin where the heart and soul of *chicanidad* are manifested; *querencia* develops out of this space of strength and belonging.

However, *querencia* follows the Chicanx diaspora; wherever it lands, wherever it develops roots. Therefore, this project builds upon the *querencia* found within the Midwest; specifically, the neighborhood of Roosevelt Park along Grandville Avenue, also known as the “César E. Chávez Boulevard” in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Keywords: Querencia, Chicanidad, Bilingual Ethno-Poetry, Mural Photography, Identity

Introduction

MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan is made in the effort to rectify the void within academic research regarding Latinx in the Midwest region of the United States. This collaboration includes photography and bilingual ethno-poetry as well as an explanatory narrative juxtaposing these two unique creative forms.

Some academics and grassroots activists want to challenge the notion that Latinx are newcomers to the Midwest of the United States of America. For example, Omar Valerio-Jiménez, the editor of *The Latina/o Midwest: Reader* explains Latinx “have resided in the region for over a century, and have contributed to the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of rural and urban Midwestern communities” (Valerio-Jiménez & Vaquera-Vásquez, 2017). These words act as a theoretical framework for our project, which looks at the history making and cultural contributions of Midwestern Latinx, specifically in the Southwest region of Michigan and centering upon Grand Rapids, the state’s second largest city.

Our study embodies the idea of ‘Place-making’ as its focus is the Latinx Grand Rapids community within the Grandville Avenue corridor. Place-making, gaining a voice through identity and a sense of origin, has a name in Chicax Studies, which is *querencia*. This term has origins in both Spanish speaking and Native American Indigenous cultures, therefore *querencia* takes on a *mestizaje* intersectionality. The hybridized Spanish word could be derived from the verb *querer*, to want, to desire, to love. But it could also come from the noun - *herencia* or heritage. Like the Chicax concept of *Aztlán*, the sacred place of origin where the heart and soul of *chicanidad* are manifested; *querencia* develops out of this space of strength and belonging.

Terminology: Querencia, Latinidad, and MiChicanidad

Querencia:

To define *querencia* is difficult because it is forever evolving as it is felt differently by many people. *Querencia* is a connection with land, and with water, which sustains life. It is a remembrance of one’s history, where one began. It calls upon a place of origin. Yet, it also transcends a want and desire for where one’s future will lead. Thus, *querencia* is not grounded spatially by the traditional concept of *Aztlán*, that of the U.S. Southwest. Rather, *querencia* follows the Latinx diaspora; wherever it lands, wherever it develops roots.

Chicano author Rudolfo Anaya tries to aid those who require an explanation of this term. In *Querencia: Reflections on the New Mexican Homeland*, Anaya states in the foreword: “Querencia is love of home, love of place”(Anaya, 2020). This intuition he learned as a child. The concept of querencia is unspoken, and in order to gain a true definition of it, querencia must be lived.

Those who have been raised with the idea of querencia understand that it is meant to be defended. It includes family, neighbors, and one’s *querida patria*. Although querencia implies a beloved homeland, and a specific geographical place, it also “spreads out to the larger country”(Anaya, 2020).

Anaya explains that he and his community were taught this *legado* by his ancestors, *los antepasados*. “[The] history of la partia chica, which included all the Hispano villages and the Indian pueblos... includes all the vecinos” (Anaya, 2020). Love of querencia is inclusionary, it is part of *la comunidad latina*. It is regional, it is national; it includes the diaspora of all Latinx.

Anaya makes clear that in addition to community building, querencia also reflects an “enduring love for the sacredness of the earth, for the unity of life, for a harmony that brings peace and happiness” (Anaya, 2020). Querencia is connected to the land. Yet, “it is more than a sense of place: it is a special relationship to la tierra madre” (Anaya, 2020). Therefore, as individuals within a community that honor querencia, humanity must respect the earth within our role as her caretaker, because she is our provider.

Like stated before, querencia semantically is a hybridity. The word fuses two Spanish words together, *querer* - to love, and *herencia* - heritage. It also demonstrates a multicultural hybridity as this concept is created because of the Spanish European and Indigenous blood that runs through its mestizo veins. Anaya rhetorically questions, “What happens when two cultures meet, each with its own sensibility of querencia?” (2020). Thus, querencia symbolizes the intermeshing of “[two] different worlds but each tied to a sense of place, la madre tierra, the water... to understand querencia from our viewpoint today, we have to understand the history of querencia” (Anaya, 2020).

Therefore, querencia as a concept is also a call to action for those within its communities to reestablish a love of *la querida patria* so that this sacred *Aztlán* will thrive again. In so doing, lessons need to be learned; all world views need respect, and these truths need to be taught to the next generations (Anaya, 2020).

Rudolfo Anaya and the other authors in *Querencia: Reflections on the New Mexico Homeland* champion the idea that, “one can make querencia wherever one lives” (2020). Wherein, querencia is not dependent on the traditional definition of Aztlán, the sacred land of Chicane that includes the present day Southwest of the United States of America, all the way south to the *Nahuatl* communities surrounding la Ciudad de México. Aztlán is wherever the Chicane diaspora has extended, survived, and grown; and as a result this place-based concept thrives through its querencia.

In this way, Anaya (2020) calls to, “expand the meaning of querencia”. He states, “If we pinpoint all our querencias on a map... they form a grid – millions of querencias connected to each other.... This querencia grid identifies and describes our knowledge and cultura, and it is a great source of power. La cultura cura. This poetic grid contains the stories, songs, poetry, alabados, fiestas, the joy and suffering of our ancestors. The grid is the source and inspiration for the stories, songs, and poetry we write today”. (Anaya, 2020)

Therefore, querencia constructs creativity in a variety of forms as it is a response to one’s culture and one’s identity. To create is another way to respect the earth, and the community in which one is raised. Artistic creation whether visual art like murals or photography provide a story through images. Art like ethno-poetry gives voice to one’s ethnicity and heritage through verse. Yet, in our globalized world Anaya (2020) recognizes that, “[we] move in and out of different cultures, aware there is always a larger, accepting querencia that includes us all”. Querencia is not bound by a traditional Aztlán, but incorporates creativity and livelihoods within all forms of *latinidad*.

What is *Latinidad*?

Latinidad is a hybridized word that fuses two nouns pivotal in importance within Latinx Studies - *latino* and *comunidad*. *Latino* is a more general, all encompassing term. It refers to anyone who has Spanish heritage but whose origins are in the Americas, and they have either moved to the United States, exiled, or were born within an immigrant family. That part is key, *latinos* are people who are now living within the USA; but their country of origin could be in the Spanish speaking Caribbean, México, Central America, or South America. *Latinidad* represents a pan-latinx community.

Although ‘more encompassing,’ *Latino* is a patriarchal word and connotes the power of patriarchy. *Latino* is masculine, it is used for those who identify as male. *Latina* is feminine, it is used for those who identify as female. *Latin@* is gender neutral. *Latinx* is all genders and pluralities. *Latinx* is a progressive term that is more inclusive, yet typically it is used in academia and is written rather than spoken.

Within *latinidad* is another group, los chicanos. Chicano specifically refers to Mexican Americans or Nuevomexicano-Americans. This term concerns people of Mexican heritage (whether español, indigenous, or mestizo) who now live in the USA. This regards those that moved here as children or are second or subsequent generation born in the United States. Chicano is masculine and used for those identifying as male. Chicana is feminine and used for those identifying as female. *Chican@* is gender neutral. *Chicanx* is all genders and all pluralities. *Chicanx* is considered a progressive and academic term.

Like *Latinidad*, *Chicanidad* is a fusion of two pivotal nouns within *Chicanx Studies*- Chicano and *comunidad*. To play on these words, academic Dylan Miner uses the idea of *MiChicanidad*.

MiChicanidad

Chicanx or Mexican American cultural identity inhabits many borderlands, whether ethnic borders or physical borders. Like stated previously, *Chicanx* is defined by one’s Mexican heritage yet having either immigrated as a child or having been born in the United States. *Chicanx* are U.S. citizens or have earned social citizenship by accepting the lifestyle of the United States and choosing to live within its borders.

Historically, many are compelled to identify the American Southwest as the mythical *Aztlán*, or the sacred ancestral homeland of *Chicanx*, since these particular states share a border with Mexico (Valdez, 2013). However, as the *Chicanx* diaspora has grown, as more Mexican Americans have migrated throughout the United States and have chosen to stay in a variety of places; the concept of *Aztlán* has widened to include more spaces.

Specifically, a new kind of *MiChicanidad* has developed within Michigan along the Canadian border and thus establishes *una frontera norteña* (Miner, 2008). Although much of European American culture addresses *lo*

mexicano as being ‘south of the border’, the Chicane community in Michigan demonstrates how *Aztlán* has dispersed. *Aztlán* does not imply a limited geography upon the Southwest U.S. and Mexican border, rather the idea of a sacred land includes a variety of places, one of which is also the Midwest.

Historically, the Chicane working-class has long been in the Midwest. Within Michigan, the demand for laborers came from two economic sectors, agricultural and industrial (Miner, 2006). In the earlier part of the twentieth century, many migrants came from the US Southwest and Mexico border areas as agricultural laborers. When recruited to the central part of the state, Mexican Americans were hired as *betabeleros* to pick sugar beets which is Michigan’s largest crop (Miner, 2008). Elsewhere, workers were hired to harvest blueberries (the western lakeshore of Lake Michigan) and cherries and grapes (in the northern part of the lower peninsula near Traverse City).

By the 1930s a significant population of migrant Chicane had taken up residence in more urban and industrial areas such as Southwest Detroit. These workers were recruited to the Detroit metro area because of the growing steel and automobile industry. They were hired as cheap labor, replacing European-American GIs whose positions in the railyards or within the factories were vacant because of WWII.

Once Chicane families moved north, they created their own communities, such as the Southwest Detroit neighborhood of Mexicantown. This *barrio* thrived then because of their perceived racial difference and presumed inability to assimilate like European immigrant laborers. However, today Southwest Detroit is an example of how a community established roots grounded in Mexican heritage but within Michigan and created their own MiChicanidad *querencia*.

The Place

Like Southwest Detroit’s Mexicantown neighborhood, Grand Rapids, Michigan has a thriving Latinx *barrio* along the Grandville Avenue Corridor. *MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan* builds upon the sense of belonging and multicultural identity found within this predominantly Spanish-speaking immigrant neighborhood.

To give a historical background, the area encompassing the Roosevelt Park neighborhood to Downtown Grand Rapids along Grandville Avenue has been an immigrant community since its establishment. This street within the city of Grand Rapids began as a Dutch ethnic enclave because it connected Dutch American settlements in West Michigan to those in New Holland and Chicago, Illinois. Grandville Avenue leads to Chicago Drive, which in 1836 was the only ‘highway’ into the area and therefore linked the metropolis of the Chicago area to other areas of the immigrant diaspora (Angelo, 2012).

This urbanized center is anchored by two brick buildings modeled after Amsterdam Architecture. Mirroring each other on either side of the street, a school and a fire station were constructed on Hall Street and Grandville Avenue. Hall School was built in 1892 providing K-8 education to the Dutch American community. Later in 1955, it was remodeled and named Hall Elementary School.

By the 1960s, the neighborhood along Grandville Avenue was called Roosevelt Park; and it was known as an area within Grand Rapids that was accepting of new immigrants. Over the decades migration patterns to this area created a vibrant home to a variety of ethnicities. In the 1980s, the demographics of this immigrant neighborhood changed again to predominantly Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Later, more Latinx representing a pan-Spanish speaking population moved into the area.

Because of this evolution in demographics, the pillars of this community have been repurposed to accommodate the needs of the neighborhood. Hall Elementary is now César E. Chávez Elementary School (2009), a transitional bilingual Kindergarten through 5th Grade. And, the fire station is the Hispanic Center of West Michigan (2007), which organizes cultural activities, provides entrepreneurial advice, and creates youth academic programs.

Like Southwest Detroit, which was once labeled as Mexicantown and has grown to include others; the Grandville Avenue Corridor community now represents a greater *latinidad*. Chicanx, exiled Cuban Americans, Dominicans, and Central American refugees have reestablished their *MiChicanidad querencia* in this *barrio* founded within the Latinx diaspora.



**Image 1: Daniel Combs
César E. Chávez Elementary School a transitional bilingual school
to 5th grade**



**Image 2: Daniel Combs
Hispanic Center of Western Michigan 1204 Grandville Avenue, at
one time a Fire Station**

In following poem, “El barrio de Grandville Avenue / The Grandville Avenue Barrio”, poet Darla Romero reflects upon her Latinx neighborhood and her sense of *querencia*. Romero speaks of the discrimination that many within her community have endured. Yet, she closes her poem with pride. Pride in her *salvatrucha*, *mexicana*, *americana* heritage. Pride in her family and the support they have given her as a second generation immigrant and first generation college student. Darla is an example of the flourishing roots of this community. She is a graduate from César E. Chávez Elementary School who now is an Education Major, a Spanish Secondary Major, and a Communication minor at Aquinas College (Class of 2021). Ms. Romero plans to return to *el barrio de Grandville Avenue* as a bilingual education teacher.

El Barrio de Granville Avenue

Darla Romero

Ellos nos critican.
Nos critican porque somos diferentes.
Diferente comparado a ellos.
Este es mi barrio.

Ellos nos miran como si no pertenecemos.
Miran a nuestra piel y discriminan de dónde somos.
Este es mi barrio.

Unos dicen que nosotros les robamos los trabajos,
pero no es cierto.
Más bien, no tenemos las mismas oportunidades como ellos.
Este es mi barrio.

Unos nos juzgan porque hablamos español.
Nos hacen caras como si fuéramos unos extraterrestres.
Este es mi barrio.

Piensan porque no somos de aquí,
no tenemos derechos como ellos.
La verdad es, todos somos humanos.
Este es mi barrio.

Mi barrio tiene una variedad de culturas.
Unos son de Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, México, Puerto Rico y la lista sigue.
No importa de dónde venimos,
lo que importa es nuestro destino.
Este es mi barrio.

Mi barrio tiene una variedad de negocios:
bodegas, peluquerías, tintorerías, pastelerías, todas latinas.
Nosotros queremos salir adelante y por eso, luchamos por nuestra familia cada día.
Este es mi barrio.

Mi barrio tiene escuelas donde los niños ahora tienen la oportunidad de estudiar.
La oportunidad que nuestros padres no tuvieron.
La oportunidad de tener un oficio, una profesión.
Este es mi barrio.

Mi barrio no es tan bonito, pero para mí, es suficiente.
Mi barrio, llena de latinos quienes trabajan tan duro.
Este lugar, es mi barrio de Grandville Avenue.



**Image 3: Daniel Combs
Banner announcing the Grandville Avenue Corridor
in the Roosevelt Park Neighborhood**

The Grandville Avenue Barrio

Darla Romero

Many of them judge us.
They criticize because we are different.
Different compared to them.
That is my barrio.

They look at us as if we don't belong.
They see our skin and discriminate against us because of where we are from.
That is my barrio.

Some say we steal their jobs,
 but that is not true.
We still, don't have the same opportunities like they do.
That is my barrio.

They judge us because we speak Spanish.
They make faces at us like we are extraterrestrials.
That is my barrio.

They think that because we aren't originally from here,
 that we don't have the same rights as they do.
The truth is, we all are human.
That is my barrio.

My neighborhood has a variety of cultures:
Some are from Cuba, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the
list continues.
It doesn't matter where we are from,
 What matters is our destiny.
This is my barrio.

My neighborhood has many businesses:
 Mom and Pop shops, hairdressers, dry cleaners, and bakeries; all of
 them Latino owned.
We want to get ahead, and because of this, we fight for our families every day.
This is my barrio.

My neighborhood has schools where children now have the opportunity to study.
The opportunities our parents didn't have.
The opportunity to have a career, a profession.
This is my barrio.

My neighborhood is not all that pretty, but for me, it is good enough.
My neighborhood, is filled with Latinos who work really hard.
This place, is my barrio on Grandville Avenue.

Those who came before

Often, when one considers Latinx living within the United States one considers specific regions where a diaspora has reached; such as Mexican heritage people along the Southwest border or California, Cubans in Florida, and Dominicans or Puerto Ricans in New York. Typically, the Midwest region of the United States is overlooked as an area of the Latinx diaspora. This is in error.

As Valerio-Jiménez states (2017), “Since the late nineteenth century, [Latinx] have provided their labor to various Midwestern industries and spread their culture throughout rural and urban areas”. Mexicans and Chicanx were the first to arrive in large numbers to the Midwest, followed by Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, and eventually Central and South Americans.

Projects like *MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan* add to the body of U.S. Immigration History and Cultural Studies because this collaborative piece reflects upon a specific Michigan based *latinidad*. Research and creativity such as this foments dialogue that helps understand the Latinx diaspora's long-standing ties to the Midwest. And because of the “region's appeal to new migrants... successive waves of [Latinx] newcomers” have arrived in Michigan's urban areas. The reason being, cities like Detroit and Grand Rapids provide many economic opportunities.(O. Valerio-Jiménez & Vaquera-Vásquez, 2017)

Historic migration of Mexican heritage people to the Midwest was cultivated upon seasonal agricultural work. In the beginning, migrants were encouraged into the region through employment incentives; in Michigan folks came north to work in the sugar beet industry. Sugar beets are Michigan's largest agricultural crop, especially in the Central and Southeast parts of the

Lower Peninsula (Huey, 2018). Once workers came, they established ties to the area as well as ‘back home’ creating cultural ties and cyclical migration between México, Texas, and Michigan.

Mexican heritage migrant workers first came north for two reasons. In 1910 Mexican families fled the Mexican Revolution. They hoped to escape the effects of war. Many lost their family’s land and therefore livelihood. Because of this displacement and the subsequent persecution for being *mestizo*, migrants went north in search of a better life. Many chose Michigan since the agricultural sector was in need of laborers.

A few years later, demand for Mexican and Chicax workers grew as the United States entered WWI. Many European-American male laborers left as soldiers and Midwest industries needed a new cohort of workers. The United States government issued, The Immigration Act of 1917, calling for *braceros* – Mexican manual laborers – to come north. Thus, a circular migration pattern was established from México to Southwest border States, to the Midwest region and back. At this time, migrants were attracted to cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and Minneapolis, not for agricultural work, but for automotive, steel, and railways (O. Valerio-Jiménez & Vaquera-Vásquez, 2017).

Need for Latinx migrants continued and a steady supply of laborers came north. Single male laborers were the first to migrate, but as they encountered stable employment, the workers sent for their families. Reunification of family helped increase the Latinx population in Midwest cities. Fathers wanted their sons nearby; brothers encouraged siblings to travel north where they could create community. Soon multigenerational families joined the diaspora in Midwestern states like Michigan.

Support of Mexican and Puerto Rican migration to the Midwest industrial areas intensified with the declaration of WWII. Once again, many European-Americans enlisted. In order to replace their dwindling numbers in the automotive and steel factories, Latinx were recruited. These initiatives were the 1942 Bracero Program, calling for Mexican and Chicax laborers to relocate; as well as ‘Operation Bootstrap / Manos a la Obra’ which encouraged Puerto Rican Islanders to come to the mainland (O. Valerio-Jiménez & Vaquera-Vásquez, 2017). These programs provided work permits so that Latinx laborers would relocate to the Midwest region. Once established, they would send for their families, often choosing to stay and therefore breaking with the circular migratory pattern.

An example of relocation on the migratory path and the choice to stay is voiced in Edwin Martínez's poem, "¿Qué será de ellos? / What Will Become of Them?" His poem voices his respect for his *antepasados*. He recognizes that the sacrifice and resilience of his parents, grounds him. It was his parents' desire to create a place for their family, that resonates in the *querencia* he now feels as a Chicano living in Michigan who is free to creatively express his *MiChicanidad*.

Martínez uniquely expresses himself through his poetic voice. He is a DACA student at Aquinas College having graduated with a Spanish Major May 2020. Edwin continues to contribute to his community as a small business owner. Despite his personal positive involvement in his community, his extended family lives in the shadows because their social citizenship is not officially documented.

¿Qué será de ellos?

Edwin Martínez

Se conocieron cuando eran muy jóvenes.
Montaban caballos y vivían en los ranchos.
Fue amor a primera vista.
Los dos huyeron de sus hogares, su amor no fue aceptado.
El querer es más poderoso que las tradiciones.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Una vida completamente nueva para los dos.
Era la primera vez que vivían en una ciudad.
Muy rápido se acostumbraron a su nueva vida.
Inesperadamente, los visitará una cigüeña en 9 meses.
Los amantes no sabrán que hacer.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Nueve meses de ansiedad.
Nueve meses de trabajos nuevos.
Nueve meses de miedo.
Nueve meses de ser vistos como un fraude frente de su comunidad.
Nueve meses más de un amor que crecía cada día.
¿Qué será de ellos?

La cigüeña hizo su visita, era muy esperada.
Ahora los amantes tienen otra vida en sus manos.
Tienen una responsabilidad más grande que su propia vida.
Quieren ofrecerle lo mejor: una familia, la educación y el amor.
Pero están en México, donde la gente lucha para prosperar.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Se van a ir de este lugar que ellos tanto conocen.
Irán a una tierra completamente nueva.
Un idioma que ellos nunca han escuchado antes.
Edificios en los que sus ojos nunca han sido puestos.
Sin dinero, sin plan, sin conexiones.
Los 3 se suben al avión.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Un año vivieron en Texas.
Dos años vivieron en Chicago.
Tres veces fueron expulsados de su casa.
Cuatro años vivieron sin dinero y sin saber que pasará la mañana siguiente.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Oportunidades siempre vienen y se van.
La familia empieza un negocio de construcción.
La vida empieza a mejorar.
Mejor comida, mejor educación...
Y luego, otra cigüeña viene en camino.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Las luces rojas y azules brillan en el espejo.
El corazón hunde en su estómago.
Los nervios producen lágrimas ansiosas.
Con las muñecas apretados por las esposas,
el padre fue forzado a dejar su familia.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Tres años la familia sufrió de todo lo imaginable.
Los demás ayudando en cada aspecto posible.
Tres años durmieron en la misma cama.
Tres años el teléfono fue la única manera de comunicación.
¡Pero el amor nunca se les falló!
¿Qué será de ellos?

Un día, la madre no despertó al hijo para la escuela.
Fue el padre quien lo despertó con un beso.
Ese mismo día, el padre conoció a su hija por primera vez.
La veía como la más hermosa, la más tierna, y la más adorable en el mundo.
Por fin, están juntos otra vez y nada los podrá separar.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Después de 15 años, los padres todavía luchan por lo mismo.
Les han dado la mejor educación posible a sus hijos;
oportunidades que ellos nunca tendrían en México.
El hijo es la primera en su familia que se graduará de la universidad.
La hija está en camino de tener logros inimaginables.
¿Qué será de ellos?

Ellos probaron que los demás fueron equivocados.
La unidad es posible.
La felicidad es alcanzable.
El éxito es logrado.
El amor continua.
¿Qué no será de ellos ahora?!



**Image 4: Daniel Combs
Three Little Birds – Migrations – Mural
880 Grandville Avenue and B SW**

What will become of them?

Edwin Martínez

They met when they were young.
Riding horses and living in the country side.
It was love at first sight.
The two of them fled their homes; their love wasn't accepted.
Yet love is stronger than tradition.
What will become of them?

A completely new life developed for the two.
It was the first time they lived in the city.
Quickly they accustomed to their new life.
Unexpectedly, a stork would visit in 9 months.
The lovers didn't know what to do.
What will become of them?

Nine months of anxiety.
Nine months of working new jobs.
Nine months of fear.
Nine months of being seen as frauds by their own community back home.
Nine months of a love that continued to grow each day.
What will become of them?

The stork made her visit, it was very anticipated.
Now the lovers have a new life in their hands.
They have a responsibility greater than their own lives.
They want to offer him the best: a family, an education, love.
But they are in Mexico, where regular people fight to prosper.
What will become of them?

They are going to leave this place that they know so well.
They will go to a completely new land.
A language they have never heard before.
Buildings in which their eyes have never landed.
Without money, without a plan, without connections.
They climb into the plane.
What will become of them?

One year they lived in Texas.
Two years in Chicago.
Three times they were evicted.
Four years they lived without money and
 without knowing what would happen the next morning.
What will become of them?

Opportunities come and go.
The family begins their own construction company.
Life begins to improve.
Better food, better education...
And behold, another stork is on its way.
What will become of them?

Red and blue lights whirl in the rear view mirror.
His heart dives into his stomach.
Nerves produce anxious tears.
With his wrists bound in handcuffs,
 the father is forced to leave his family.
What will become of them?

Three years the family suffered everything imaginable.
Others came to the aid.
Three years they slept in the same bed.
Three years the telephone their only means of communication.
But love never fails!
What will become of them?

One day, the mother doesn't wake up her son for school.
It was the father that woke him with a kiss.
This same day, the father met his daughter for the first time.
He saw her as the most beautiful, gentle, and adorable child in the world.
At last, they are together and nothing will separate this family.
What will become of them?

After fifteen years, the parents still strive for the same things.
They have given the best education possible to their children;
 these opportunities they would never have had back home in Mexico.
Their son is the first in the family to graduate from the university.
Their daughter is on her way to attain unimaginable goals.
What will become of them?

They proved that everyone else was wrong.

Unity is possible.

Happiness is achievable.

Success is gained

Love continues.

What won't become of them now!

Latinx Change Agents

Over the last fifty years, some communities within Midwestern states such as Michigan have undergone a “Latinoization”. According to Louis Mendoza, this term refers to cultural and social change that grows as more Latinx immigrants choose to relocate within the United States. Thus, Latinx become change agents by ‘place-making’ a space for their own identities within their chosen communities (Mendoza, 2017). Therefore, Roosevelt Park toward Downtown Grand Rapids along the Grandville Avenue corridor is an example of the Latinoization of a specific community in Michigan.

Several factors contribute to the Latinoization of communities in the Midwest. For example, agriculture and manufacturing industries rely heavily upon Latinx labor and create demand for this workforce. Latinx communities of origin have the supply, and because of an entrepreneurial spirit to find the ‘dream’ many Latinx undertake the challenge of migration (Mendoza, 2017). Thus, the presence of growing Latinx communities builds where families are unified and strengthened.

Once Latinx neighborhoods are established, questions regarding agency develop from within the community as a response to the surrounding community’s reaction to the Latinoization of the neighborhood. Latinx in-group reflections regard questions such as, who are we? Who belongs? Who has the authority to have voice within our community? Who represents us within the state of Michigan? And lastly, who will our advocates of social justice be (Mendoza, 2017)?

These didactic questions demonstrate that the Latinoization of Michigan’s communities is not a passive process (Mendoza, 2017). Neighborhoods like Grandville Avenue in the city of Grand Rapids become centers of social justice and community change when Latinx leaders use their voice to advocate for their community. This is promoted through the activism of community centers like The Hispanic Center of West Michigan. It is further

grounded in cultural and artistic programming curated by the Cook Center of the Arts or the importance of language maintenance with bilingual schools like César E. Chávez Elementary School. Additionally, MiChicanidad *querencia* is reflected in public street art such as murals and sculptural installations that represent the cultural pride of the area.

During the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, both Chicanos and Chicanas became involved politically within the cause (Hernández Vázquez, 2009). Many joined the movement to promote Chicana/x identity and a need for a collective voice in order to gain political representation for the group as a whole. “For a long time the Chicano Movement was concerned only with the discrimination that had cut [Chicana/x] off from our ‘historical’, and more importantly, from our ‘cultural’ past” (Apodaca, 2009). Yet decades later, the efforts of Chicana/x Social Justice have grown to be more inclusive.

In particular, activism has evolved within the Midwest as the political mission has moved from agricultural labor rights to industrial labor rights, and now advocacy for youth to gain an education and to not join gangs. As more women and families reunited with their husbands or their extended family who had arrived previously; concerns changed to include not only workers’ rights, but also family rights. This is how Chicana/x activism has changed today. More voices are involved, especially those of youth organizations and women. Therefore, it is imperative to promote the confidence in Latinx youth so that they learn to use their voices.

In the following poem, Brian García Palacios becomes an advocate for his community as he expresses the injustice of being targeted by the police through racial profiling. Through his poetry, he denounces what has happened to him so that others who are not aware of these types of discriminatory practices realize these tactics occur. His outcry explains that this treatment is not only commonplace in large metropolitan areas like Chicago or Detroit, but also in smaller towns within the Midwest like Grand Rapids, Michigan.

García Palacios’s poem is an example of activism because he demands change. Like Mendoza, he hopes to inspire an audience to “view others as whole human beings with distinct histories, values, and qualities that complement their own and enrich their lives – not threaten it” (Mendoza, 2017). Brian aims to not only be an advocate in word but also deed. He plans to give back to his community upon graduation and lead as *un hijo del barrio*, making his Guatemalan immigrant father and Mexican immigrant mother proud of his accomplishments as a first-generation college graduate from Aquinas College in 2021.

Los inocentes

Brian García Palacios

Charlo con mi primo mientras la música suena.
El sol brilla este día en el suroeste de Michigan.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Viene la policía.
Nos siguen las luces azules y rojas.
Nos detienen.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Hablo con mi primo.
Nos miramos.
Los dos sudando nerviosamente.
Estamos confundidos.
No hicimos nada.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Mi carro con ventanas tintadas.
El policía llega, y bajo la ventana.
“Sal del carro” me grita.
Siento el calor afuera.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Le pregunto “¿Por qué? Yo no hice nada.”
Repite “¡Sal del carro o te voy a sacar!”
Abro la puerta; y me tira al piso.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Mi primo llora con miedo.
Tirados los dos en cemento caliente.
“Cálmate Luis. Estamos bien,” le digo.
El policía nos revisa nuestros bolsillos sin resultados.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Nos deja en el piso con las esposas apretadas.
La tierra ensucia mi cara.
De nuevo, revisa el carro sin resultados.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Siento discriminado por el color de mi piel.
Nunca pensé que esto me pasaría.
Pienso en mi familia, y mi libertad.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Regresa el policía.
Nos quita las esposas.
Nuestras muñecas son hinchadas y adoloridas.
Nos deja ir; ni siquiera dice perdón.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Yo no era él quien estaban buscando.
Me faltaron el respeto.
Nos trataron como delincuentes.
¿Qué nos puede pasar?
Somos inocentes.

Me quedé con el dolor y el miedo.
Sigo pensando en este momento.
Recordaré esta memoria para siempre.
¿Cuáles otras cosas nos pueden pasar, si somos inocentes?



Image 5: Daniel Combs
Latinidad

The Innocent

Brian García Palacios

I chat with my cousin while the music plays.
The sun beams on this day in Southwestern Michigan.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

Here come the police.
The blue and red lights follow us.
They detain us.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

I talk with my cousin.
We look at each other.
Both sweating nervously.
We are confused.
We didn't do anything.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

My car with tinted windows.
The police arrives and I lower the glass.
"Get out of the car", he yells.
I feel the outside heat.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

I ask him, "Why? I didn't do anything?"
He repeats, "Get out of the car or I will take you out!"
I open the door, he throws me to the ground.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

My cousin cries in fear.
Both of us thrown to the steaming cement.
"Calm down, Luis. We will be okay," I tell him.
The policeman scans our pockets without results.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

He leaves us sprawled out on the ground with bound hands.
The earth dirties my face.
Again, he checks our car, without results.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

I felt discriminated against because of the color of my skin.
I never thought this would happen to me.
I think of my family, my freedom.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

The policeman returns.
He takes off the cuffs.
Our wrists are swollen and hurt.
He lets us go, but without an apology.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

It wasn't me who they was looking for.
They disrespected me.
They treated us like delinquents.
What can happen to us?
We are innocent.

They left me with a pain and a fear.
I still think about that moment.
I will remember that memory always.
What other things can happen to us,
even if we are innocent?

A Call to Action of 'La Generación Zeta'

The new generation coming of age within the United States is called Generation Z. This nomenclature represents people born in the late 1990s through the early 2000s. Generation Z is more diverse than any other U.S. previously born generation. Statistically, 25 % of this *nueva generación* are Latinx, whose families have made a place for themselves inspired by the dream they see as possible of attaining while adapting to life in the United States of America.

Academic Valerio-Jiménez (2017) explains that those who identify as Latinx share a "lived identity", which is "a racialized and politicized through everyday experiences and social interactions". Those living in the Latinx diaspora of the Midwest have adapted alongside their non-Latinx neighbors. Additionally, this *nueva generación* is more willing to challenge racial and gender inequalities that they view as unjust. Generation Z is unique because it sees value in a collective history, one transmitted to them by their grandparents or elders within their community (Valerio-Jiménez, 2017, p.15). Yet, they focus on the present by exclaiming, "¡Aquí estamos!" (16). Thus, these younger adults hope to progressively transform the Midwest.

Examples of this pride in a multicultural past and an acceptance of a diverse future is symbolized in the following two poems. Each reflects upon one's personal identity and how the authors encounter a sense of belonging. Dominique Foley, in "Mi identidad / My Identity" expounds upon her Irish-American father's side of the family as well as her Mexican-American mother's traditions. Growing up in Dearborn, Michigan; Dominique moved to the west side of the state to go to college at Aquinas College (2021). Dominique prizes the ethics her hybridized family has instilled in her as she wants to give back to diverse communities as a Secondary Math Education teacher, perhaps in a bilingual school like César E. Chávez where she has mentored.

Aubrey Ruíz, in "Soy compuesta de todas estas partes / I am Made of All These Parts"; remarks upon her family traditions as well. She honors both her Mexican-American father's heritage, and her Mormon mother's customs which were fused together during her childhood in Utah. Remarkably, her mother's decision to move to Michigan while Aubrey was in high school, led Ruíz to choose Aquinas College for her undergraduate studies where she delved further into investigating what it meant to be a bilingual *americana*. Aubrey embraces a continued "school of life" as she has mentored at César E. Chávez Elementary and hopes to inspire her own students in the future upon graduation in May 2020.

In each of their situations, these Latinx women have learned to embrace their hybrid identity because both sides of their family, the Mexican and the Anglo, have made them into the proud Chicanas they are today.



**Image 6: Daniel Combs
661 Oakland and Rumsey Street**

Mi identidad

Dominique Foley

La gente piensa que te conocen.
Te miran y asumen cosas.
Pero en realidad, no te conocen.
No conocen tu identidad.
No de verdad.

La gente no sabe que mi identidad
es el calor de las tortillas que cocinaba mi abuela Zenaida.
Y que las ponía en mis mejillas para sentir su calor.

La gente no sabe que mi identidad
son las salidas a La Gloria Bakery en Bagley St. para comprar conchas:
chocolate, vainilla, y yema.

La gente no sabe que mi identidad
es una gran familia extendida.
Llena de voces, peleas, y bromas.
Todos diferentes.
Pero todos Foleys.

La gente no sabe que mi identidad
es el zumo de uva espumosa
que hacía mi abuela Eileen
que bebían todos mis primos y tíos
cada Día de Acción de Gracias.

La gente no sabe que mi identidad
es una fusión de dos culturas:
El sonido del español que hablan mi mamá y mi abuelita.
El sonido del sarcasmo irlandés que habla mi papá.

Se puede decir lo que quiera.
Pero mi identidad de verdad es mi pasado:
mi familia irlandesa y mi familia mexicana.
Sin las dos, no sería yo.

My Identity

Dominique Foley

People think they know you.
They look at you and assume things.
But in reality, they don't know you.
Not truly.

People don't know that my identity
is the heat of tortillas that my Abuelita Zenaida made.
And that I would put them against my cheeks to feel their warmth.

People don't know that my identity
includes our outings to La Gloria Bakery on Bagely Street to buy pastries:
chocolate, vanilla, meringue.

People don't know that my identity
is a huge extended family.
Filled with voices, fights, and jokes.
All different
But all Foleys.

People don't know that my identity
Is a fusion of two cultures:
The sound of the Spanish that my mom and grandma speak.
The sound of Irish sarcasm that erupts from my father.

They can say what they want.
But I know the truth of my identity is my past:
My Irish family and my Mexican family.
Without them both, I wouldn't be me.



**Image 7: Daniel Combs
Dream Mosaic on Grand Rapids Children's Museum
Fulton Street and Sheldon**

Soy compuesta de todas estas partes

Aubrey Ruíz

Estoy pensando: pensando en un tiempo cuando me sentí completa.

¿Qué se hace una persona entera?

¿Un nombre?

¿Una familia?

¿Una casa?

No hay un punto de claridad en mi vida.

Las memorias que residen en mi mente me recuerdan de todo.

Lo bueno.

Lo malo.

Lo bello.

Lo feo.

Estoy sola en esta existencia; viviendo entre los demás.

Me observan, ¿pero ellos pueden verme?

Soy interesante.

Soy cómica.

Soy simpática.

También soy perdida.

Tengo un nombre largo y mezclado, ¿no me crees?

El primero es muy americano. El último, muy mexicano.

Pero no aparezco como crees que debería.

Soy americana.

Soy mexicana.

Soy una chicana orgullosa.

Vengo de una familia grande y mezclada, ¿no me crees?

Tuve experiencias de ambas culturas que me criaron.

Cazuela de judías verdes.

Tamales y arroz.

Ensalada de ojos de ranas.

Sopapillas.

Tengo tres casas. Una de mi madre, una de mi padre, y una muy lejos de los dos.
Ahora hay paz. Antes, nunca tuvimos la calma.

Los niños, éramos los peones, un juego entre los padres.

Nos mudamos mucho. Tengo pedazos de mi en muchos lugares.

Utah.

Arizona.

Michigan.

No quiero cambiar nada, pero he pensado en otra vida alternativa.

Si apareciera como los dos lados de mi familia, si solo tuviera una casa,
si mis padres nunca pelearan.

Pero soy yo.

Todo que ocurrió es parte de mi.

He aprendido que todo en la vida me moldea.

Continúo creciendo.

Soy compuesta de todas estas partes.

Me crean quien soy.

I'm Made of All These Parts

Aubrey Ruíz

I am thinking; thinking of a time when I felt complete.

What makes a person whole?

A name?

A family?

A house?

There isn't clarity in my life.

The memories that reside in my mind, remind me of everything.

The good.

The bad.

The beautiful.

The ugly.

I am alone in this existence; living amongst the rest.
They observe me, but do they really see me?

I am interesting.
Funny.
Friendly.
But, I am also lost.

I have a long and messy name, you don't believe me?
The first is stereotypically American. The last, authentically Mexican.
But I don't appear as you think I should.

I am American.
I am Mexican.
I am a proud Chicana.

I come from a large and messy family, you don't believe me?
I have had experiences within both cultures that raised me.

Green Bean Casserole.
Tamales y arroz.
'Frog Eyed' Salad.
Sopapillas.

I have three houses.
One with my mother, one with my father, and one very far away from them both.
Us kids, we were their pawns, a game between my parents.
We moved a lot. I have pieces of myself in many places.

Utah.
Arizona.
Michigan.

I don't want to change anything, but I have thought about an alternative life.
If only I appeared like I belonged to either family, if only I had one house,
If only my parents had never fought.

But, I am who I am.

Everything that occurred, is part of me.
I have learned that everything in my life has molded me.
I continue to grow.
I am made of all of these parts.
They make me who I am.



**Image 8: Daniel Combs
Cultural Center 900 Grandville Avenue**



**Image 9: Daniel Combs
Girl Reading: when new worlds open.**

Conclusions

Similar to our project *MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan*, poet Levi Romero asks, “What is the connection between place and identity?” His question epitomizes what was undertaken in our collaboration, because as he explains, “[o]rigin stories the world over feature accounts of where a people came *from* as a way of telling how they came to *be*” (Romero, 2020).

In his article *Mi Querencia: A Connection between Place and Identity*, Romero quotes Juan Estevan Arellano who wrote that *querencia*, “gives us a sense of place, that which anchors us to the land, that which makes us a unique people” (Arellano, 2007). The above statement is true of those included in this collaboration. The Latinx diaspora which has found a home in Southwest Michigan has developed a *querencia* based in this state and is proud of its *MiChicanidad* identity.

The State of Michigan, its Southwest region, the surrounding area of greater Grand Rapids, and specifically the Grandville Avenue corridor grounds the place-based writing included in *MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan*. The ethno-poetry selections give voice to this area and the photography provides a visual story for those that live here. The poetry, murals, and creativity document how *querencia* inspires, “a person’s allegiance and territorial affection toward their community” (Romero, 2020). This sense of loyalty obligates Latinx and other social advocates to participate in the maintenance of a *MiChicanidad querencia*.

Romero explains, “It is not enough to speak of one’s love for *querencia* without participating in the maintenance that ensures its health and well-being. *La querencia es de él quien la mantiene* (the homeland belongs to those who care for it) (Romero, 2020). Thus, the creative participation within this collection of poetry, photography, and explanatory narrative is, “like a tightly woven *trenza*, [that] is braided to the landscape, the people, [and] the culture” (Romero, 2020). Through our poetic verse and pictorial imagery we join the call to action by advocating for *MiChicanidad* within the Midwest as a whole, and to purposefully gain attention for the Latinx community within Grand Rapids, Michigan.

MiChicanidad Querencia in Southwest Michigan is a collaboration that considers through narrative, poetry, and photography a greater *Aztlán*. One that includes the traditional Southwest region as well as the far reaches of the Chicax diaspora. The poetry included recognizes places of origin, and a

new Place-making within the Midwest. The explanatory prose reflects upon the hybrid identity of Latinx within the United States. It looks specifically at the present realities of those living within the Roosevelt Park neighborhood along the Grandville Avenue corridor of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Like *The Latina/o Midwest Reader* attests, “the Midwest is thus a region of distinct but overlapping *Latinidades*, rural and urban, established and emergent, which have been forged over the past one and half centuries through labor migration, urbanization, placemaking, and cultural production” (Valerio-Jiménez & Vaquera-Vásquez, 2017).

This cultural production is exemplified in the murals and sculptural installations within Grand Rapids as well as the bilingual student poetry reflecting upon their own Midwestern formed *latinidades*. The poetry voices how a sense of *querencia* informs their present. Thus, this project, “[leads] us to a place where we gain new insight into our common ground and our mutual destiny with the residents of not just the United States but also the Americas” (Mendoza, 2017). Expression through creativity, the pursuit of social justice, and the desire to be change agents within our communities does not start and stop at the border (Mendoza, 2017). Rather, these issues flow throughout the Latinx diaspora, even in the Midwest, and specifically to areas such as Roosevelt Park along Grandville Avenue in Grand Rapids, Michigan.



**Image 10: Daniel Combs
“Michigan” Mural on Grandville Avenue and Oates Street**

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**The Sonoran Desert:
The Smooth Space and Striate Place of *The Dreams of Santa
María de las Piedras and Pilgrims in Aztlán*
by Manuel M. Méndez**

Alejandra Rengifo

Abstract

Miguel M. Méndez's commitment to the Chicano language, culture, and history are very palpable in his two novels *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras* (1989) and *Pilgrims of Aztlán* (1992). The use of a wide array of characters included in his texts—the migrant, the downtrodden, the insane, the hungry, the alcoholic, the Yaqui Indian; in sum, the “other”—is twofold: they serve as a pretext to exalt the people, history, and culture of an unknown region and to give a voice to the Sonoran Desert. His novels are the concave and convex of the Sonoran Desert, a smooth space and a striate place that portrays the true life of the border while simultaneously illustrating what it means to be a survivor of the desert.

Keywords: Sonoran Desert, borderlands, ethnic-studies, immigration, Chicano.

The Sonoran Desert spans the southeastern tip of California, the southwestern part of Arizona, Baja California, Baja California Sur and the northeastern part of the Mexican state of Sonora. It is the hottest desert in Mexico and home to unique plant species like the saguaro and organ pipe cactus. It is also an actant in the novels written by Mexican American writer Miguel M. Méndez. Born in Bisbee, Arizona, but raised in El Claro, Sonora, Méndez dropped out of school at an early age to work to help his family. Passionate for literature, he taught himself the art of writing. Despite having been deprived of a formal education, Méndez published four volumes of short stories, a collection of poetry, two novels and an autobiography. Due to his achievements, he was asked to teach at the University of Arizona in 1974 where he had a prosperous academic career until his retirement in 2005.

Although he was not as prolific as other Chicano authors of his generation, he contributed significantly to Chicano literature. His skills in portraying the reality of what lies beyond the aridity of the Sonoran Desert (life, death, dreams, history, and above all, hope) sets his work in a category itself. His novels *The Dream of Santa María de las Piedras* (1989) and *Pilgrims in Aztlán* (1992), from here forward the novels will be referred to as *The Dream* and *Pilgrims*, depict the struggles of the poor, the hungry, and the marginalized, life in the desert, survival in the US/Mexico borderland as well as many other themes. Méndez's work, in particular the two previously mentioned novels, goes beyond narrating the harshness of desert living and somehow romanticizes the dry terrain in a way that makes it comprehensible for the reader as well as enhances the cultural and historical values of the region. The Sonoran Desert becomes a tacit leitmotif in both texts, by taking a voice of its own and emerging as the omnipresent ruler of the life stories of the migrants that try to "make it north," as well as other characters of the novels. It is a smooth space that becomes a striate place where Méndez has woven an ode for the legendary inhabitants of this region, the Yaquis, and for his own Chicano people.

Published three years apart, Méndez's novels have noteworthy similarities and differences. Both are written as internal monologues (*Pilgrims* more than *The Dream*), portraying Chicano characters marked by registers that show they belong to different sociolinguistic communities. This is the first and foremost characteristic of his writings, "a commitment he made to the nascent Chicano literary movement in order to rescue his oral history and to create the necessary images to document Chicano history, culture, and presence through the vehicle of the Chicano's ancestral language" (Rodriguez

del Pino, 1994, p. 89). The two novels deal with pilgrimage and incorporate elements of magical-realism that enrich their plots (to learn more about this novel as a magical realist text a good article is “Social and Magic Realism in Miguel Méndez’ *El Sueño de Santa María de las Piedras*” by Roland Walter). Both “discover cyclical movements that do not fit into the traditional linear paradigm of pilgrimage where self-fulfillment and wholeness are discovered in a new and different place” (López Pulido, 2001, p. 312) and explore the geographical and historical development of the Mexican American population of the borderlands at the foot of the Sonoran Desert.

His first novel, *The Dream*, is the story of a town in the Sonoran Desert, Santa María de las Piedras, that “will never cease to be a mystery. Perhaps it is nothing more than the reflection of the desert towns turned by the sun into mirrors irradiating soaring flames and humanity that converge here” (Méndez, 1989, p. 3). It is narrated, mainly, by five elders that reunite every afternoon in the plaza to tell one another, as well as whoever wants to listen, how the town has lived and survived since it was founded. The narrations seem more like fables than real stories, making the novel an interesting literary exercise regarding what it means to be a town that is a “frontier of cactuses, stones, sand, and fire between Mexico to the south and the United States on the northern side” (p. 3). It is a town like that of García Márquez’s Macondo with a somewhat founding family: Rumboso Noragua, a gentle and respected patriarch, and his obedient wife, Marcolfa Pérez. The family has the peculiarity to come from numerous generations of Noragua that have inherited the gene of madness, “[i]n every family with a Noragua, if there were several brothers at least two would be mad. Those who did not go mad, nevertheless, begat madmen” (p. 15). All the situations in this town are a dream and as such they are told in fragments, lacking both order and reason. The oneiric element of the story plus the orality, a trademark of Méndez’s literary style, are two aspects that make the novel unique. This is a community that has survived the inhospitality of the desert, consequently, “[t]o understand the nature of the town, the reader must contextualize its existence in terms of historically and socially-based situations alongside the mystical and existential journey of one man, depicting the nature of his universal struggles as one within mankind” (De Vertich, 2015, p. 95). The characters are an addition to an already solid story about this desert town, somewhere in northern Mexico.

An aspect that sets apart Santa María de las Piedras is that it is a community that lives off what the desert gives them and seems unperturbed by the presence of the United States to its north. The people of the town never really acknowledge its existence because they don’t know any better, they

have always depended on whatever the desert provides them, that is, on what they can get from the cactus, the animals, the drought or the rain. However, this lack of interest about the neighbor to the north changes when the fifth child of the founding family, Timoteo Noragua, learns about that magnificent country; changing his life forever. This is interesting because Timoteo's personality never showed to be one that would be touched by events such as this. He is the child that everyone believed to be "mute until he started talking like a professor at the age of eleven" but that "never cried for food or water, even though his lips were white and dry. Doña Marcolfa even forgot about Timoteo for three days, constantly occupied with the chickens. There were times when the child slept on the back patio with a dog for a pillow and two others to keep him company" (Méndez, 1989, p. 18). As an adult and father of five children, he goes into one of his taciturn states after hearing the story of the great nation to the North. He is smitten by what he hears from a patron at the town store: a country where everything is beautiful, food for everybody, great cities, immense richness so it should be seen and lived on. As a matter of fact, he decides that he needs to find this magical place, hence he packs up his donkey with water and food, and starts the trekking of the desert, surviving the heat, wild animals, and even a sandstorm because he must see the country of marvels. He wants to meet the one that created all the beauty he heard about in that forgotten town in the Sonoran desert. When he finally is at its footstep, he "pushes his burro from behind. The animal balks. [...] He makes him take a few steps; the animal enters through the entrance gate, followed by his master. They now stand in the United States territory. There before them stands the country of marvels" (p. 47). From this moment on, his trip is a magical experience because as a matter of fact he is in a different universe, one where richness is inexhaustible, water is within a hand's reach, and roads and cities are illuminated. It is the desert but not the same one he left behind. It is the American desert. The telling of Timoteo's trip is in third person, done through the character's eyes. He sees, lives, marvels and searches for the god Huachusey, the maker of all the beauty he encounters. Although he fails to find the creator of these beautiful things, Timoteo is besotted by the country because it is completely opposite of his place of origin: "they continued on their way through beautiful regions caressed by a gentle spring breeze. [...] All they could see around them in the green of the forests, the mountains, and the plains was a gentle setting with laughter, happy sounds, and the chattering of squirrels and wild animals pampered by the heavens" (p. 97). Timoteo, from Santa María de las Piedras, in the United States wanders, discovers and "[d]espite a grounding in historical and social reality, the author incorporates the

magical and downright bizarre, such that the validity of even the contrived journey is not questioned by the reader” (De Veritch, 2015, 95). Timoteo is the first from his town to discover the wonders, uniqueness, and perfection of the United States. Timoteo’s journey intensifies the mysticism that surrounds the country for those that long to live in it. His cosmic vision of this newly found world is Méndez’s way of not only molding “a universe where the miraculous and the real create a mysterious, timeless fluidity, where various times and spaces flow together, where the unreal happens as part of reality” (Walker, 2014, p.14) but of juxtaposing the reality of both sides of the Sonoran Desert: the Mexican side is barren, hopeless, inhuman while the American is vibrant, promising, beautiful. An ontological reality that affirms the popular belief that like Midas, all that Americans touch is converted to gold while south of the border the *status quo* of peril persists. Timoteo’s trip becomes then the representation of many migrants’ reason to undertake the same journey, the United States is the country of wonders where one will find richness.

On the other hand, while Timoteo Noragua and his trip to the novel land is the core of *The Dreams, Pilgrims* is a succession of stories that are unfolded by the main character: the Yaqui, Loreto Maldonado. He is a proud 80-year-old man living in Tijuana who washes cars in order not to starve. On his daily wandering in the main streets of Tijuana in search of cars to wash, he finds people whose life stories are told to and by him “[t]he voices that aborted the streets, the sordid alleys and the slums, so many voices wounded with human pain The laments arrive like that to the Yaqui Loreto, telling vulgar stories that didn’t move anyone, despite the tragic, because they are repeated daily ...” (Méndez, 1992, pp. 42-43). These stories are the collective memory of “the community of the desert,” a desert that has a different tint to that of *The Dream* because this desert is the one that takes away compared to the one that shelters and gives life in *Pilgrims*. In this story some characters know each other, others don’t, nevertheless, they all share the crossing of the desert, the anxiety of being at the gate of the coveted place and the uncertainty of how and if, they will be able to cross it. The stream of consciousness in this novel is more palpable than that found in *The Dream*, making it harder to trace a linear progression in the narrative. They possess two things in common: the city and the desert. The characters all have experienced crossing, or even living in, the Sonoran Desert and they are now in the city that lodges them until they can cross to the north. True, none of these lives are that of well educated, middle class people, and among those migrants there might be the literate or the poet like Lorenzo Linares, but they are the exception, the rest are the working class, the hungry, the poor.

While *The Dream* is a novel of the magical, *Pilgrims* is that of the migrant. The stories told in this narration are those of famished, dirty, illiterate people either living in Tijuana waiting to find a way to cross to the United States in search of work or the ones crossing the desert to get to the border: “Méndez’s novel, which on the one hand, attempts to evoke a lived reality through the eyes and voices of the people who occupy Tijuana’s underworld, at the same time, and on the other hand, invents Tijuana as a mythic construct, a symbolic spatial referent for a generalized political and social problem” (Castillo, 2001, p. 48). This city becomes then the metaphor of the US/Mexico border: it is a Mexican town economically and socially oppressed that lives off the American visitors, a floating population, that crosses to go bar hoping and prostitution (*Pilgrims* 118). The locals just lure them into their establishments to make money. The text portrays an authentic image of Tijuana: a vibrant, large city twenty miles or so from San Diego and since “[c]ities are frequently associated with speed, movement, energy and a 24/7 economy and culture, but they are also spaces of continuous dwelling and of innumerable fixities” (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011, p. 8) this metropolis is, as a matter of fact, one that has been deprived of being a beacon in Baja California because of its quality of being a passing city. All the benefits of being so close to the United States have not flourished here and some of the fixities that have materialized are poverty, prostitution, drug trafficking; it is a mandatory migratory path for those wanting to reach the United States thus the sense of belonging is lost. Migrants that get stranded in Tijuana converge in a place that with time turns out to be harder than the desert itself. It is a city where all those that can’t cross need to survive yet due to their own condition of being poor and illiterate, jobs are scarce because “[i]n that peculiar border city, apparently so happy but in reality so tragic, among all those that floated without roots what saddened the Indian Loreto was seeing so many wetbacks swarming with their hungry faces waiting to cross to *gringúia*” (Méndez, 1992, p. 39) making this a part of the calvary they have to endure to find a better life. It seems that they prefer to roam around in this city than go back to where they are originally from. Returning home is not an option, crossing the desert again can be fatal. The crossing of the Sonoran Desert in *Pilgrims* and living in it (*The Dream*) becomes then the concave and convex of the same dream, the same nightmare.

These paradoxical images of the same desert are what makes these novels so appealing. Méndez manages to give his readers insightful ways into the human relationship his characters have been able to establish with this sublime place. It is worth mentioning that literature about the desert is wide and varied. They range from the Hebrew Bible to historical writings

such as *Lawrence of Arabia* (1924) by Thomas Edward Lawrence, to the vivid impressions in *Roughing It* (1872) by Mark Twain, to *Steep Trails* (1918) by John Muir. One way or another they all portray a complex locus. This locus can be sacred or damned, can cleanse or soil, can render sane or mad, “[i]t has been noted that the desert is a place of purity and cleanness” (Jasper, 2004, p. 11) and it is also a place of beginnings or ends. This is the case for a good number of the characters in Méndez’s two novels: their lives either begin or end in the desert. Experiencing the desert can be a mystical journey because it is a place where one can find peace, quietness, and oneself. The desert can incite reflection on human finitude and human capacity to deal with the grandiosity of nature. It can be loved, it can be hated. It is a place that can cause anyone quiver at its sight, its immensity. Such feelings may be familiar to the city person or those who have never lived or experienced the desert but when one lives in it, things and people are different. The world is contingent to what the desert gives, and, as mentioned earlier, its inhabitants are a product of it. Desert towns can be an isomorphic space like Santa María de las Piedras and are living proof that the desert also gives back and is alive within all the dryness and barrenness.

When discussing the Sonoran Desert in Méndez’s works there is the need to specify the difference between space and place. According to Yi-Fu Tuan (1975), place “is a center of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience” (152), while “[s]pace is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty, inviting the imagination to fill it with substance and illusion” (165). Based on Tuan’s formulation, Tijuana is the place where all the stories told by Loreto Maldonado converge, while the Sonoran Desert, as an empty landscape is the space where the character can still be the Yaqui Indian who once fought in the Revolution. In both novels the division between space and place (Tijuana in *Pilgrims*, Santa María de las Piedras in *The Dream*) is always clear. The characters live in the place surrounded by the wide space. They are determined by their environment; they are shaped by it “[t]he spirit of the inhabitants of Santa María de las Piedras was rough like that of the region. A hostile nature produced in its midst an astute and coarse population. [...] Certainly, they were soft people on the inside, like cactuses, but also like cactuses they were thorny on the outside” (Méndez, 1989, p. 38). The desert shapes them, they are who they are because the only life they know is the one that has been provided to them by the space and place where they

live, however, “spaces are not simply contexts, they are also actively produced by the act of moving” (Cresswell and Merriman, 2011, p. 7) and the many characters of these two novels prove this.

Furthermore, in *Pilgrims* the desert and Tijuana denote what Deleuze and Guattari formulated about smooth and striate space in *A Thousand Plateaus* where “[t]he Smooth and the Striated’ introduces smoothness and striation as a conceptual pair to rethink space as a complex mixture between nomadic forces and sedentary captures” (Lysen and Pisters, 2012, p. 2). The unique immigrants in Méndez’s texts are nomadic forces who share the same goal: to live in the United States. There is continuously someone trying to cross that smooth space (the Desert) that is halted by the striated space (Tijuana) becoming then a sedentary capture. This constraint of crossing the smooth space of the Sonoran Desert to be stopped by the striated space of Tijuana adds to the impossibility of reaching the yearned dream because that smooth space “is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; [a] striated space [that] is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space. In the first case, the desert endures organization; in the second, it gains and grows; and the two can happen simultaneously” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 475). The migrants fall then into this antagonistic operation of going from the desert to the city. In the latter, they are nomads going from town to town looking for work, food, and water in a place that is arid, harsh. They accept their reality as they do the rulings of the desert. The smooth space grows simultaneously along with the striated space. The Sonoran Desert and Tijuana are two forces that the migrants must deal with if they want the life they have dreamt.

Now, Méndez’s vision of the desert is one that is in contention with that of its inhabitants and nature itself: “[m]any places, profoundly significant to particular individuals and groups, have little visual prominence. They are known viscerally, as it were, and not through the discerning eye or mind” (Tuan, 1974, p. 162). This is because for Méndez, who lived in the desert town of El Claro, the Sonoran Desert is an archetype of the barren life of many migrants that want to cross to the United States, consequently it is both life and hope. It is a visceral experience that not everyone can tolerate. The imagery represented in his texts are full of realism, of human experiences that enrich, for better or for worse, the daunting Sonoran Desert. The author’s notable bond to a place that has brought sadness and pain to many people is reflected on his writings. One has to remember that this is the region where Méndez’s family originates, where he grew up. It was his first, and perhaps, only homeland. As Tuan expresses “[a]ttachment to the homeland is a common human emotion.

[...] The more ties there are, the stronger is the emotional bond” (1977, p. 158), and Méndez’s emotional promise is not only to the land but to what flows from it: the people, the language, the towns.

Another way in which Méndez exalts the Sonoran Desert is in the inclusion of realistic stories to convey a message to those that don’t know about what it is like to live or cross this region: “[n]o one does not know, unless it is very stupid, that the thorns of choya go into the feet like they do into cheese and when you take them out they leave the sheath of which they are provided” (Mendez, 2003, p.33). The many characters presented in his texts are representatives of the real people that have died trying to cross this mighty place or that have made it to Tijuana only to be stranded in the border city. Regardless of what these people have gone through or how they have survived he has made sure that they have a voice just as the desert does. Although some insist “[t]he experience of the desert is primarily auditory rather than visual” (Jasper, 2004, p. 3), for Méndez the desert is full of voices, stories, experiences, colors, and sounds. For him it is both, auditory and visual. Regarding the desert, the poet Edmond Jabès, quoted by Jasper (2004), once said,

You do not go into the desert to find identity but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void. You *become* silence. It is very hard to live with silence. The real silence is death and this is terrible. It is very hard in the desert. You must become more silent than the silence around you. And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak. (p. 2)

Méndez’s characters and story defy and confirm Jabès’ statement. They leave their place of origin knowing who they are but once in the desert they all are the same, a migrant in peril, anonymous, “in the middle of that much light, my friend, a young man died of thirst [...] I don’t even remember his name” (Méndez, 1992, p. 41). Many don’t survive the inescapable force of the desert. The reality of the desert is overwhelming, the voice of this silent ecosystem can be heard in its sandstorms, in the hissing of the snakes, in the blowing of the wind, in the whispers of the dead, in the sun hitting the burning rocks. It is through this natural phenomena that the Sonoran Desert speaks loudly, and Méndez has made sure to portray it in his texts.

The desert, vilified and romanticized by many, gives but also takes away. It is the home of Loreto Maldonado and of the inhabitants of Santa María de las Piedras. It is where life begins but also ends. The Sonoran Desert is the

reason why so many can't make it north but, it is also the origin of one of the most enduring and resilient tribes of the region, the Yaquis. It is worth noting that if there is something Méndez's tries to do with his writings is to honor his Mexican American heritage from the Sonora state/desert, from both sides of the border. It is important to note this because the depiction of the original settlers (Yaqui Indians) and the need to use the Spanish language within the Chicano culture are two indelible characteristics of his way to praise his cultural background. It is through his character Loreto Maldonado (*Pilgrims*) where he best renders the version of what the Yaquis were and are. Loreto is the quintessential representation of a Yaqui Indian, and it is through him and others, like Rosario Cuamea, a fictional Colonel from the Mexican Revolution, that Méndez pays tribute to the rightful settlers and owners of the Sonoran Desert.

The Yaquis are Native American inhabitants of the Yaqui river valley in the Sonoran Desert in the State of Sonora. A branch of this tribe and important settlements can also be found in the Southwest region of the United States in Arizona. History appraises that “[e]n esta región se produjo la más larga lucha armada registrada en la historia de México, casi cuarenta y dos años de duración si nos atenemos a su periodo álgido (1867-1909)” (Taibo II, 2013, p. 13), and this was one of many wars they had to fight since the first conquerors made contact with them in 1533. At the beginning of the conquest the Yaquis numbered around thirty thousand people; the current population stands at approximately ten thousand. The decrease in the community's populace is the result of years of wars, genocide, enslavement, and the neglect of the government. However, throughout history the Yaquis have been able to withstand the blows of the conquerors, the Mexican government and the harsh weather of the region. They are a tribe of warriors, of survivors and —why not? — of descendants of the original tribes that once lived in Aztlán, and, as such, Loreto Maldonado represents them.

As a result, it is thanks to Loreto that the reader finds out more about what it is like to live at the threshold of paradise but not to be able to pass it, what it is to cross the desert, die there or make it, what it is to be poor, hungry but, like him, proud of the Yaqui ancestry. Loreto, who in his early 20s, had “smooth skin, high cheekbones, with muscles as springs that could push him wherever he wanted” (Méndez, 1992, p. 24) is now a wrinkled, toothless old man who walks with difficulty but is still very proud of his heritage and who he is: “the aristocratic lady put in Loreto's hand a five pesos bill. [...] She sweetly told him ‘Help yourself with this humble alm, good man’. No! He answered haughty. ‘I work, I don't accept nobody's alms’. They saw him walk

away with difficulty, stumbling with his dignity” (Méndez, 1992, p. 9). This kind of dignified attitude may seem arrogant but, he is a man with a sense of decorum, which makes him a legendary figure within the migrants that pass by Tijuana on their way to the north and cross their paths with his. Loreto comes from a lineage difficult to beat, the Yaquis. Unconsciously or by nature he acts defensively and with propriety against the world and its elements, people included. For him it is a matter of survival as his people have been surviving since 1533. Loreto encompasses the loftiness of a whole tribe; his sense of living worthily thanks to one’s work is incomparable:

[t]he old Yaqui worked dragging his stick iron will, he worked hard; he had the gesture of determination although his shell looked dry, tanned like a mummy’s cover, blackened by many suns and winds [...] What so many princes with moron faces would have not given, with their stupidity dangling from their aristocratic smiles, for the solemn royalty of the wretched Yaqui. (1992, p. 22)

This is who he is, a worthy descendant of a fighting lineage. Loreto is not the only Yaqui portrayed in the novel. The Revolutionary Colonel, Rosario Cuamea, is also present when the story goes back to the time of the Mexican Revolution, when Loreto was young and fighting for an ideal. Consequently, the Mexican Revolution is woven into the story via Loreto’s memories and with the character of Rosario “Chayo” Cuame. He is the fictional representation of real revolutionary and legendary fighters (Cajeme and Tetabiate) of a Revolution that promised agrarian reform that would benefit the poor. Inserted randomly, with no foreword or conclusion, like other stream of consciousness narrative, they are Méndez’s tribute to the history of this region, to the people of the Yaqui river, to the Sonoran Desert.

Moreover, the author’s honoring of the battles, ideology, fighters and sentiments about the Revolution are present especially in both of his novels. For example, the character of Rosario Cuamea appears in *The Dreams* as well as in *Pilgrims*. His deeds don’t repeat in the novels; as a matter of fact, they complement and complete each other. In *Pilgrims* he is presented as Loreto Maldonado’s peer in the Revolution War. In *The Dream* there is a more complete picture of him and what he did during the war and for the Yaqui people. In this novel his personality is further exposed showing him as a ruthless fighter ringing a bell to Cajeme’s and Tetabiate’s war personalities. The fact that “[i]n Colonel’s Rosario Cuamea’s troops there were more pure Yaquis than mestizos” (1992, p. 153) shows how historically and fictionally

the Yaquis have really been: tireless protectors of their land and culture. As mentioned earlier, Cuamea's personality is that of a fierce rebel who is not afraid of anything, he is an eccentric man that falls in love with lady Death. Ever since his very first encounter with her, his obsession is such that he ends up marrying a woman that had "a bony frame covered over with leather, with breasts as flat as a plank, buttocks with no padding whatever. [...] That's why Rosario Cuamea loved her, because he saw in her his skeletal fantasy, his beloved woman of death" (Méndez, 1989, p. 154). Death, on the other hand, grows afraid of him, and avoids Cuamea until the time she has to take the revolutionary to her realms. Rosario Cuamea, however, tricks her and seduces her before she takes him, an anecdotal story that mixes popular culture elements with literary ones like magical realism. This episode with Death in both texts diminishes for a brief moment, the seriousness of the topics treated throughout the novels rekindles Méndez's attempt to keep his two novels, in particular *The Dream*, of the storytelling variety, enhancing his interest, as it was mentioned earlier, in preserving the art of oral tradition which has been lost by literacy and the passing of the elders that kept it alive. *La flaca, la calaca, la huesuda*, whatever the name Death is given by people in the Mexican/Chicano culture what is real is the cultural significance of this figure. It is culture, tradition and the way it is portrayed in *Pilgrims* only adds to the story and its importance of reinforcing the value that folklore and oral tradition have for a community and how through literature it can be preserved.

Similarly, the historical information included in the novels cements the author's interest in documenting a history that has not been rightfully recognized or taught. The incorporation in the stories of the guerrilla wars the Yaquis have fought in different moments in time is the perfect way to illustrate the importance of idiosyncrasy, personality, and beliefs to these people. The Yaquis lost battles but the knowledge, physically and emotionally speaking, they have had of the terrain, has allowed them to last as long as they have. Once again, the Sonoran Desert, a tacit character in the novels and in real life, turns out to be the axis of the two stories and the history of the tribe. The desert, that sublime landscape, is where the Yaquis have always lived and returned to. They are sons and daughters of the desert as shown in the character of Loreto Maldonado whose attachment to it has kept him in the Mexican side of the border. His staying in Tijuana, and going back and forth to where he is from, clearly denotes an emotional bond to this space and "[w]hen space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place" (Tuan, 1977, p. 73) and that is what has happened to Loreto, this space has become his place. He has developed an attachment for the place and "people may, however, become

strongly attached to a natural feature because more than one tie yoke them to it” (p. 158); this is the case with Loreto and the desert. It is part of him, he is part of it and like Lorenzo Linares, the migrant poet, says:

I got lost in the sand dunes of the Sonoran Desert, searching for it, to teach me the language of silence. I searched for it to tell me what it had asked the stars. Feeling my soul so lonely in that surface so full of sand and with the sky so thick of luminaires feelings won me over, and I cried when I saw in the desert the dreamed homeland that would take me in its lap like a mother that loves and protects equally all her children. (Méndez, 1992, p. 83)

It is precisely with characters like Loreto Maldonado and places and spaces like the Sonoran Desert that these two stories give the reader a deeper understanding of the social oppression and alienation the Yaquis and migrant workers have endured not only in Mexico but in the United States. The landscape that has been their most loyal allied but also the one they fear the most, the desert, has been a constant truth in their lives. Loreto is a survivor of the Revolution, the desert, and he has a profound knowledge of it. He battled on that land and was born on it, and it is his home. One can't forget Timoteo Noragua who crossed the desert to reach a dream, similar but at the same time different to that of hundreds of migrants: to experience a place where the hardship of poverty is mitigated by the beauty money gives.

The stories of Miguel Méndez are full of colorful characters, histories and realities. His use of oral tradition can make them challenging to read but how they are told is what keeps the reader loyal to them. The topics include the effects of social injustice on the poor, the alienated and subjugated. Méndez was a writer whose commitment to the Chicano cause was unequivocal thus his insistence in portraying characters from the region he knew best, the Sonoran Desert from both sides of the border. He gave voice to the impoverished, the hungry, the forgotten, the Sonoran Desert. Méndez honored his people and his beloved region. He gave a voice to a natural element that is majestic, tumultuous, giving and unforgiving. This perhaps is one of the most impressive aspects of his writings, the way he was able to make the desert another character of his stories. One that can be unsurmountable most of the times, one that is the owner of the lives of those who try to cross it but at the end one that can give life and hope like it did for the people of *The Dreams of Santa María de las Piedras* and *Pilgrims of Aztlán*.

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Soy de Boriken

Marie Nubia-Feliciano, PhD

I am from Vieques y Culebra, islands off of the big island of Puerto Rico.
From strong women with strong arms and backs and minds who know
what's right

and know how to fight for what they believe.

I am from pig sties and blood sausage, conchas y caracol.

From concrete and dirt, the home my grandfather built filled with
music and family.

From dirt roads, the church across the street, humble dress and
sermons in Latin.

From febrile seizures, asthma, allergies, tape worm, and pop-up clinics
because there were no hospitals where I lived.

I am from single parenthood and alcoholism, clothes ready in bags to
go when things got difficult at home.

I am from school, school, and more school.

School is solace from a turbulent world, where I learned English,
learned the flute, learned to love knowledge.

I am from arroz con gandules, caña, y pasteles. Soy campesina que
hace todo con las manos.

From machetes, correas, y chancletas que vuelan!

From tropical breezes, beautiful humidity, and swaying palm trees.

From struggle, struggle, and more struggle.

I am Merita, an AfroBoricua child with a joyous heart, an easy laugh,
and a wonderful smile...despite it all.

I am from fading memories of my beautiful Boriken, and Spanish
slowly becoming Spanglish.

I am from Isabela, Maria, Gladys, Janet, Charles, Debbie, and Tymen
and Tayla.

From a fall love affair that ended with me...1969 was a great year.

I am from all of what was and what will be.

I am from a legacy of sacrifice that I will carry in my heart-mind.

I am Africa, Italy, and Taíno...trenzas que me hacen quien soy.

I am from hope and legacy.

Yo soy de Boriken.

Artist Statement

René H. Arceo

During this unique time period of unprecedented experiences in our lifetime, like many other artists, I have tried to reflect and respond through my graphic images the experiences surrounding these times. The cover image is part of a set of three prints I have created that provide a snapshot of societal aspects which concerned me during the 2020-2021 pandemic years. Many Latino families in Chicago, and in particular Mexican like myself, have been so disproportionately affected by this virus due to the fact that so many of them work in the service sector. They have been exposed to COVID-19 while working at the restaurant and hotel industries primarily, but in construction, packing companies, supermarkets, and landscaping as well. Additionally, many in that community have been misled into believing that vaccines were ineffective or dangerous and thus were afraid of getting inoculated.

The idea for this print came from the earliest reports that pointed to the likely-hood that COVID-19 jumped from bats to other animals and then to humans in China, where bats are considered a delicacy. Scientist have proven that bats carry naturally several viruses without being affected by them. The increasing exposure of humans to wild animals carrying deceases has been on the raise, particularly by two factors: the fast population growth and human encroachment into wild animals' habitats in countries like China. This country was already the source and originator of SARS in recent years, now we experience COVID-19, and who knows what is next.

Artistically, I have worked carving linoleum for many years and lately, more and more I have been carving wood. So, for this print I decided to include both; printing a background with the carved wood block to create some texture using the natural woodgrain. For the final image, I used the carved linoleum which offers a solid color impression without texture, and in this way contrasting with wood block printed area. On top of the composition, I used a stylized Aztec bat with broad opened wings. I enjoy stamp designs from the Mesoamerican region so when I learned about the implication of Chinese bats linked to the virus, I immediately thought about including this image. There are Covid-19 virus symbols hanging from the bat while radiating negative energy below onto a large central figure. The young female figure stands with uncertainty while all red radiating energy surrounds her and infects her. It is a moment frozen in

time where there is no decision made as to whether or not she will survive or perish. As the weeks and months passed by, it has become evident that with the aid of vaccines there is a good chance for survival, of a future for our community.



Guardianes, 2012
Linocut print on paper
22 x 30 inches

This image was inspired by a young woman, who served as the model for the central figure in this piece. The figure represents humankind as she is the source of life. Laying down she simulates mountains, and embodies mother nature herself. I subscribe to the belief that humans need to reconnect with mother earth to reach some level of balance in our lives. Nature is what has nourished humankind through millennia yet we continue to negatively impact it by polluting and disrespecting it. I recall seeing a similar combination of woman-mountain from one of the artists from the time of the Mexican mural renaissance. I like equating a woman with nature as a woman provides life, nourishment, and sustenance, not unlike mother nature. In this print, I placed the woman surrounded by several guardians including the seated

glasses-wearing figure in the front, an image from the Huastec culture. In the background is an Aztec representation of a sun and a standing pre-Columbian female figure from the Chupicuaro culture in Western Mexico. There are also several ethereal figures as ghosts or spirits that mimic the seated figure and thus multiply the guardianship of nature.

Artist Statement

Ruby Barrientos

Abstract:

In May of 2020 the world was in the middle of a pandemic and the United States faced a heightened political climate under the Trump Administration. The United States was feeling the pain and loss of George Floyd as he was yet another example of a black man dying at the hands of police brutality. Ruby Barriento's artist statement reflects on how his death influenced her attempt of decolonizing herself and committing to anti-racist work while creating her multimodal collection *Los Rezos de la Revolución*.

Keywords: activism, antiracism, El Salvador, immigration, decolonize



LOS REZOS DE LA REVOLUCIÓN

LOS REZOS DE LA REVOLUCIÓN embodies the power of resistance. Through these mixed media works, I, Ruby Barrientos, reject the illusion of equality that has been fed to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) in the United States. The works are an offering in prayer for change. They are a call to action to stand in opposition to the inequalities created by systemic oppression. The works in this collection are steeped in symbolism, the imperfections in the canvas represent the struggles of BIPOC in America. The characters, writing, and symbols used also bring attention to capitalism. Despite these oppressive forces, the message is clear, we must come together to RESIST.

In May of 2020, the world was in the middle of a pandemic and the United States was at its most heightened political climate under the Trump Administration. The United States was feeling the pain and loss of George Floyd as he was yet another example of a black man dying at the hands of police brutality. His death ignited the spark of a global uprising against systemic racism. It was also the catalyst that fed my need to create and use my voice as an artist to amplify the voices of the BIPOC experience in America. Part of my inspiration for these works was a process of moving away from Western notions of how I am supposed to identify myself: lacking in knowledge because I did not go to college, foreign, not belonging, and not having power because I do not come from generational wealth. I was born and raised in Reno, NV. My parents immigrated to the United States from El Salvador in the early 80s to escape the Salvadoran Civil War to give my sisters a better life. I'm grateful to them for having the courage to flee El Salvador to survive and have an opportunity to live a full life without being assassinated or persecuted. However, in my own self education and through the process of creating these works, I also had to grapple with how the involvement of the United States in El Salvador by financing and arming militia groups also caused my parents to leave their homeland behind.

The first piece in my series was a sign that I created to attend a Black Lives Matter protest after the death of George Floyd. I reflected on the importance of bringing attention to the struggles that BIPOC face in the United States, and feel it is my responsibility as an artist to use my platform to speak on important social justice issues. As part of initiating the process of decolonizing and educating myself on racial justice I decided to listen to Malcom X. As I painted, I repeatedly listened to his autobiography and speeches. Letting his thoughts and voice guide my

creative expression. It pained me to hear his story and how so much of his experience can still be witnessed 56 years after his assassination. Inspired by a revolutionary, I was determined to create works that would overwhelm the senses of those who would see them. I wanted those who visited gallery to get mad, become enraged and ask themselves why there is tolerance for so much injustice and division. I wanted to bring Malcom X's energy back as a way to spark a reckoning and create a revolution within those that viewed my work, a call to action to observers to fight for what's right.

My exhibit opened at the Front Door Gallery, (a hallway in the Church of Fine Arts building on the UNR campus) on October 19th, 2020. The political tension was at an all-time high, and as a POC, I felt unsafe having Donald Trump as President of the United States. Not even a week after the exhibit went up, students on Instagram reacted by saying that the exhibit was "a direct attack on conservative students and it jeopardized their safety" and that "it was a display of illegal political propaganda placed in the University". This was not the first time I had received criticisms, in the Summer of 2020 I was harassed numerous times while painting a mural in Reno and I was accused of being a gang member of MS13 just for being a Salvadoran artist by a proudly identified Trump supporter. Having these comments said about LOS REZOS DE LA REVOLUCIÓN in addition to other experiences with racism was a reminder to me of what the reactions of BIPOC experiences can elicit in the United States today. LOS REZOS DE LA REVOLUCIÓN is an offering to ignite, disrupt, and create a revolution. These works are a prayer so that we may be reminded of the power and strength we the people hold when we love, unite and rise up to fight for what's right.

Special Forum: Latinx Health Communication

COVID-19 and the Importance of Latinx Health Communication Representation

Leandra Hinojosa Hernández

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic radically changed life as we knew it. Those of us in academia scrambled to assess the future of our courses during the Spring 2020 semester as we transitioned our courses online within a week's time, prepared to self-isolate at home for an undetermined amount of time, and handled the dissolution of work-life balance while working from home with our children and families (as if work-life balance existed pre-pandemic). Now, over a year later, we are struggling with post-pandemic mental health concerns, fears about rising case numbers as a result of the Delta variant, and returning to "post-pandemic" life. However, outside of academic contexts, concerns about COVID-19 abound, especially for Latinx communities across the United States within the contexts of COVID-19 laborers, care, vaccinations, mis/information and dis/trust (Soto-Vásquez et al., 2020), and perceptions of how we move forward in the midst of violence, illness, and death.

According to Noe-Bustamante, Krogstad, and Lopez (2021), COVID-19 has harmed Latinx communities in multiple ways. At a micro level, Latinos currently comprise 28.6% of COVID-19 cases in the United States, second only to white populations, according to the CDC (2021). Latinos also account for 18.6% of COVID-related deaths, the highest percentage of deaths of communities of color after white, non-Hispanic communities, which accounted for 58.6% of COVID-related deaths. COVID-19 hospitalizations are also higher among Latino communities, which is evidenced in states such as Utah, Oregon, Washington, and California. In Utah, for example (where I live), Latinos comprise 14% of the Utah population and account for 20.2% of COVID-related cases (Utah Department of Health, 2021).

At a broader level, half of Latinos say they or someone close to them has faced health and financial hardships as a result of COVID-19. Fifty-two percent of Latinos say at least one family member or close friend was hospitalized as a result of COVID-19 or died from COVID-19, and 49% of Latinos say they or someone in their household have lost a job or taken a significant pay cut since February 2020. Statistics are more grim for Latinx immigrant communities-58% of Latinx immigrants without U.S. citizenship

or a green card say they or someone they know lost a job or had lower wages (Noe-Bustamante, Krogstad, and Lopez, 2021). Such statistics about transmission rates, wage loss, and death are importantly contextualized, given that 45% of Latino adults have worked in industries that required them to work outside the home since February 2020. COVID-19 rates are disproportionately higher for Latinx and Latin American migrant workers. In October 2020, for example, of the 6,000 migrant workers in food manufacturing, processing, and agriculture who tested positive for COVID-19, 72% were Latino or Latin American (Waltenburg et al, 2021). The pandemic further exacerbated the interrelated vectors of oppression and discrimination among racism, public health inequities, and death, as Latino and Latin American laborers and farmworkers were denied fair pay, equitable health access, and treatment for COVID-19 (Acevedo, 2020; Jervis et al., 2020).

Violences at the Mexico-U.S. border have also been exacerbated as a result of COVID-19 (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2020; Slack & Heyman, 2020). Violence against migrants has been a longstanding component of our country's history (Luibhéid, 2020); however, COVID-19 has magnified such violence in physical, sexual, and mental health contexts. As Hernández and De Los Santos Upton (2020) have explained, COVID-19 cases at the Mexico-U.S. border have increased exponentially as a result of the inability to social distance, too many individuals in close confinement, no healthcare structure or system in place to provide necessary health care to migrant families, and unsafe workplace conditions for essential workers. Conditions in migrant camps at the Mexico-U.S. border during COVID-19 include “paintball abuse, pepper gas, the withholding of food and medical treatment, inadequate cleaning, inadequate social distancing measures, lack of communication on basic preventive measures,” and fears of contracting COVID-19 with no healthcare access, response, or action (Gómez, 2020; Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2020, p. 145). Such concerns about COVID-19 at the border have been further heightened by racist political discourses, with the Trump administration and other politicians making racist, xenophobic statements about the Mexico-US border and migrant families in relation to COVID-19 (Blue et al., 2020), which had deleterious effects on migrant care and the asylum-seeking system. Alex Azar, the Health and Human Services director, mused whether it would be possible to American blame flare-ups of the virus on “Mexicans over the border” (Murphy & Stein, 2020). Florida Governor Ron DeSantis blamed the spread of COVID-19 on “close contact” in migrant households and on “overwhelmingly Hispanic” Latino migrant workers

and day laborers (Reston, 2020), thus weaponizing Latino intergenerational households and cultural norms to propagate racist, xenophobic beliefs about Latino families and cultural practices.

Additionally, vectors of oppression have been amplified for transgender migrants-while violence against transgender migrants at the Mexico-US border has already been a human rights and public health concern, COVID-19 has amplified migrant violence, gender-based harrassment, and misery in disastrous ways (Fernández, 2020; Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2020):

Since the start of the pandemic, at least 7,202 people held by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Ice) have been infected with the virus, and at least eight have died. LGBTQ+ populations in immigration custody have echoed the stories of other detainees who have complained that [ICE] has failed to institute adequate protocols to curb the spread of the virus and has not provided ample protective equipment and medical care. But LGBTQ+ people in La Palma say the pandemic has created further challenges, making it harder for them to escape the gender-based harassment and violence many of them have long faced while locked up. (Fernández, 2020, para. 5).

As Fernández (2020) describes the horrors and pains that transgender migrants experience in the La Palma correctional detainment facility in Arizona, news articles have abounded in the past year that have detailed physical, sexual, and mental violence at the Mexico-US border for transgender migrants. History and research has long shown us, however, that violence against migrant bodies-particularly queer migrant bodies-is magnified during times of public health crisis (Chávez 2013, 2020, 2021). Chávez (2021) explains how, in the late 1980s, the US Congress passed a ban on HIV-positive migrants by adding HIV infection and AIDS to the list of “dangerous contagious diseases” that barred migrants from migrating to the US or becoming naturalized citizens (p. 66). Such a move positioned HIV-positive migrants as threats to the maintenance of order in public health spheres, much like how public and political discourses in 2020 and 2021 have framed migrants as transmitters of COVID-19, thus justifying their exclusion (in spite of the fact that COVID-19 has torn through immigration centers in the US with little to no public health protocols in place to protect migrants from COVID-19 transmission).

Given the violences that have been briefly explained as a result of COVID-19, an interesting and perhaps unexpected finding as of late is that Latinos banded together during the pandemic and are optimistic about the future, the direction of the country, and the pandemic. In terms of offering support and help to each other, 58% of Latinos helped relatives, close friends, and community members by running errands for each other, getting groceries, taking care of each other's children, and loaning money to those in need (Noe-Bustamante, Krogstad, and Lopez, 2021). Moreover, 49% of Latinos say they are satisfied with the country's direction; moreover, when asked about the problems the United States is facing as a result of COVID-19, 65% of Latinos reported that the worst is behind us (Noe-Bustamante, Krogstad, and Lopez, 2021). Given the public health implications of COVID-19 for Latinx and Latin American communities in the United States, the goal of this special issue was to spotlight practitioner, academic, and community voices. We sought to explore the ways in which COVID-19 has impacted our communities, identify the causes of our collective grief and pain, draw connections between COVID-19 and earlier global health pandemics, and explore modes of solidarity and survival for moving forward. The articles in this special issue, written by scholars and practitioners in Communication, Gender Studies, and Health Equity contexts, begin at the micro-level and flow outward to analyses of macro-level discourses, experiences, and processes.

The first article, *Maternidad y Coraje: A Testimonio of Mental Health and Mothering Through the Pandemic* by De Los Santos Upton, is a testimonio of the struggles De Los Santos Upton has faced both mothering and parenting during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing upon modes and methods of testimonio, De Los Santos Upton explores personal, academic, and collective grief brought on by COVID-19 and speaks truth to both her rage and courage (and the rage and courage faced by other Latinx mamás raising children and families) during the pandemic. She concludes by looking to her children-her niñxs--as a source of courage, as her children, through a reproductive justice lens, help soothe her mental health and remind her of good times to come.

The second article, *Re-membering the "Mexican Flu" Pandemic: A Nepantlerx Criticism and Autohistoria* by Andrade, is an autohistoria of his experiences of living through the 2009 H1N1 pandemic in Mexico. Andrade's utilizes nepantlerx criticism and autohistoria to illustrate the history of statist and rhetorical violence against marginalized communities. Drawing connections between the rhetorical deployment of phrases such as the "Kung Flu" and the "Mexican Flu," Andrade blends personal experience, national and

international histories, and rhetorical analysis to explore the ways in which Mexicans and Mexico were vilified during the H1N1 pandemic. He analyzes “particularized and embodied experiences of macro- and micro- colonialist processes” and explores personal and community levels of marginalization during pandemics writ large.

The third article, *Pervasive Borders and Resilient Spirits: Battles in Trans Latina Healthcare Access* by Padrón, explores the health experiences of trans Latinas and the larger access, power, and inequity issues faced when navigating healthcare structures through the TransVisible Report, co-authored with the TransLatin@ Coalition. Padrón positions the analysis through the lenses of queer illegality and criminality and argues that clinics and hospitals operate as hostile and militarized border spaces for transgender Latinas. Padrón concludes that the “border is a continuous and shifting set of barriers that prevent [trans Latina] access to social, emotional, and economic wellbeing” and calls for those in power to create and sustain spaces where trans Latinas’ gender autonomy and lived experience can be valued and respected.

The final article, *La Equidad en Tiempos de Pandemia: A Case Study of Promotores on the Frontlines of COVID-19 Response in Latinx Communities in Orange County, California* by Montiel, presents a case study of the organization Latino Health Access’ (LHA) promotor-led Latinx COVID-19 Equity Initiative, which was initiated and implemented in Santa Ana and Anaheim, California. The program, which utilized an adapted Pathways to Population Health Framework (Saha Stout et al., 2017), highlights the ways in which promotores can foreground and promote equity for Latinx populations when accessing healthcare, particularly during pandemics. The article concludes with recommendations for equitable, culturally-based, promotor- and community-based Latinx healthcare.

Taken together, the authors and articles presented in this special issue provide a brief snapshot of Latinx health communication lenses, approaches, and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that this special issue is one of the first of its kind to deliberately and intentionally spotlight Latinx health communication, we (the authors and editors) hope that this special issue will serve as a starting point for further conversations and research in Latinx health communication. Health communication has long served as a space dominated by intentional whiteness (De Los Santos Upton, Tarin, & Hernández, 2021; Dutta et al., 2019; Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2019; Hernández & Martinez, 2019) wherein publishing critical, Latinx, and feminist

articles has been met with resistance (Hudak, 2019). As Hudak (2019) notes, “Critical health communication research recognizes that truth and knowledge are both constructed and reinforced by power relations” (p. 1), and our voices here (and beyond) foreground the importance of exploring and facing power relations that impact Latinx health experiences and access (Martinez, 2021). Our existence is resistance, and as Martinez (2021, p. 6) so aptly notes, (Latinx health communication) representation matters:

Representation matters: for me, for you, for all of us. We can and simultaneously do engage in theory and knowledge building from the flesh, and we can “speak out against what does not fit in [our] own historical and social experience” because, after all, “we have nothing to lose except knowledge itself” (Hurtado, 2003, pp. - 223–224).

“Though we tremble before uncertain futures, may we meet illness, death and adversity with strength, may we dance in the face of our fears.”

— Gloria Anzaldúa

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Maternidad y Coraje: A Testimonio of Mental Health and Mothering Through the Pandemic

Sarah De Los Santos Upton

I am so fucking pissed off.

I'm angry that this virus exists and has claimed almost four million lives. I'm angry that my governor continues to put profits over people and my community is now mourning 2,627 of our own. I'm angry that people didn't take this shit seriously and made it way harder than it needed to be. I'm angry that I didn't get to celebrate my daughter's first birthday with our friends and family. I'm angry that I've been working from home full time with no childcare for over a year. I'm angry that this struggle is largely invisible. I'm angry that I literally can't walk through my house without someone pulling on my clothing or body. I'm angry that I was raised in chancla culture,¹ and that this clouds my view of my children and childhood in general. I'm angry that legacies of colonization have taken away my ability to be the kind of madre I want to be.

Why am I even writing this? Maybe it's cathartic. Maybe when other people in similar situations read that they are not alone it's helpful. I know it has been for me. I seek to share my vulnerability as a powerful practice of engaged empathy and survivorship, following Martinez's (2019) example of what it means to be a testimonialista. Martinez (2019) reminds us that vulnerability is not a threat, but rather a process of engaged empathy, through which tellers and listeners create a space that is sacred, speaking their silences into existence and taking one another's perspectives. This process allows us to "translate our traumas into accessible language for the audience or reader to weave together compassion and community" (Martinez, 2019, p. 357). To be honest,

¹ La Chancla is a reference to the use of a chancla, or sandal, to discipline through hitting and/or throwing, and is often the subject of jokes in/about Latinx culture. Chancla culture "is the use of oppressive strategies-- including corporal punishment, shame, and fear-- to manipulate children into behaving which cause significant harm to a child's development and emotional development especially when employed long-term" and it works to normalize the use of fear and domination over children (Arreola-Hillenbrand, 2020a, p. 4).

I'm not sure who my intended audience is for this testimonio. I just want to say that if you are parenting through this pandemic, and dealing with whatever struggles accompany that experience, I see you. I am holding space for you. If that is not your experience, I am asking you to see me. To hold space for me. To have empathy for my situation. The power of testimonio is that as we tell our stories, we (re)center our brown bodies and experiences while simultaneously building connections to those with similar stories and channeling the struggles and triumphs of our ancestors (Martinez, 2019). Martinez (2019) explains that testimonios have been especially powerful for Latinx scholars, as they legitimize our embodied ways of knowing and literally help us survive the predominately white spaces of academia. She reminds us that "While speaking from your own tongue and body doesn't necessarily seem like a revolutionary act, for *testimonialistas* it is a form of liberation—from the oppressive powers of the academy and of society" (Martinez, 2019, p. 359).

I don't know which power I'm trying to speak truth to. All I know is I've never felt more invisible as a working mother. I feel angry at the neoliberal structure of academia, and the expectation that we continue to move forward as if everything is normal. This testimonio is a way of writing my anger into existence so that I can move towards self-liberation. This anger resides in my body, and it is trying to teach me something; my body is always trying to teach me something. I am always learning lessons from my body and from the borderlands I inhabit. Martinez (2019) argues that testimonios are an epistemology of our bodies and of the borderlands, "[b]ut not just physical bodies or physical borderlands, rather the spatial and spectral—the ones that cannot be seen, only felt" (p. 359). These testimonios of bodies and borderlands help us to claim space in the places that don't want us, both inside and outside of the academy (Martinez, 2019).

I know that academia does not want me as a woman of color and as a mother. As Young and Hines (2020) explain, "behind the rhetoric university officials provide to avoid discrimination lawsuits is a systemic and systematic cycle of disdain for women giving birth while seeking tenure" (p. 74). This disdain for motherhood in academia is heightened when directed at mothers of color, as we are presumed incompetent and viewed as not taking our careers seriously (Chang, 2020; Espinoza, 2020; Young & Hines, 2020). I knew to expect this disdain from academia, but

I was hurt and surprised to find that it sometimes comes from places you wouldn't expect. When I planned a division's program for a national conference just four weeks after giving birth to my daughter, I, in my sleep deprived haze, made an error that inconvenienced a colleague (and friend). I hoped she would have compassion for me, but she did not. My postpartum body and foggy brain were invisible to her and simultaneously an intrusive burden.

Statistics tell me that my identities as a mother-of-color and a scholar are in binary opposition, incompatible with success on the tenure track. Yet I continue to cross borders and persevere. My body and the borderlands I inhabit are using the pandemic to teach me about coraje. In this testimonio, I understand coraje to mean both rage and courage, and over the past year I have gained embodied knowledge of both meanings. While I was well acquainted with coraje as rage, a lesson learned from my own body and from the bodies of mi madre y mi abuela, I learned that in some cases it also means courage. I also learned that, much like other borders, the line between rage and courage is blurry. In what follows, I offer my testimonio of mothering through the COVID-19 pandemic for the last year, a testimonio of my embodied understandings of coraje.

Me Da Coraje: A Testimonio of Rage and Courage During the Pandemic

As I try to feed myself breakfast, my children stand next to me demanding things. "Can I have some more cereal? Can I have some more milk? ¡Más! Más! Más!" Because of shame from my own childhood, I find it incredibly difficult to ask for what I need, and so I feel great pride at my children's ability to advocate for themselves. I am simultaneously in a state of hunger²-induced anxiety and frustrated that I'm not able to feed myself, or even drink water when I need to. And this is just five minutes of what my life looks like all day every day for the past year. This is the normal stuff that any parent of two toddlers would be dealing with. Everyone says that while this phase is challenging, it's temporary. What is not normal, is to have literally no breaks, no help, no options for childcare (while being expected to work full-time), for over a year.

² Anger brought on by hunger.

My father calls for a rare check-in. “How are you doing?” he asks. I know he wants me to say “fine” so we can easily gloss over my feelings, but instead I flatly reply “we’re okay.” This prompts him to ask me what’s wrong, and I tell him honestly that my partner and I are struggling to balance work and childcare, and we are exhausted. He laughs at me over the phone and says, “Now you know what it was like for us.” The “us” he is referring to is the family he created with my stepmother after my parents’ divorce, with two children two-and-a-half years apart. I was mostly raised by my single mother as an only child, just to be clear. This is further complicated by the fact that my dad is white, and though I am mixed, I have spent a majority of my life with my mother and my Mexican side of the family on the Mexico/U.S. border. While I benefit from white privilege, I also have experiences based in my Brownness that my father can’t and/or won’t acknowledge or understand. I share this to say that this is not my first encounter with his gaslighting and refusal to hold space for my experiences and emotions. Also, I feel compelled to add, he was not parenting his two toddlers DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC with no help, literally nowhere to go, nothing to do to help entertain them and get their energy out. Oh, and I forgot to mention, surrounded by a blanket of constant fear.

Every couple of months a new story comes out in the *New York Times*, or on *NPR*, or in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about how mothers “are not okay.” The headlines read “Enough Already: How The Pandemic Is Breaking Women” (National Public Radio, 2020), “The Primal Scream: America’s Mothers Are in Crisis. Is anyone listening to them?” (Grose et al., 2020), “The Pandemic’s Sexist Consequences: Academe’s stark gender disparities are exacerbated by Covid-19” (Casey, 2021). These stories explain that the pandemic has exacerbated gender disparities, describe how mothers feel “forgotten,” and draw attention to the fact that women, especially women of color, are being forced to leave the workplace at alarming rates. It feels good to read these stories because for the first time in a long time I feel seen, my struggle is acknowledged. But nothing happens. The crisis remains. Many Latinas, for example, work in industries negatively impacted by the pandemic, and as result are disproportionately facing layoffs (Horsley, 2020). For Latina mothers who are still working, cultural pressures to take on a majority of the childcare are exacerbated by the pandemic, and many struggle to balance the competing demands of working from home while managing online schooling, cooking, cleaning, and other tasks.

As result, many Latinas faced with the competing demands of working from home and becoming stay-at-home mothers and homeschool teachers overnight feel pressured to leave the workforce in order to care for their families (Horsley, 2020).

I suffer from an anxiety disorder, which I am usually able to manage with acupuncture and regular exercise. I haven't had either in over a year. Needless to say, my mental health is slipping. I feel like I am in crisis. But I acknowledge that even though it is difficult to balance working full time without childcare, we are so privileged to be able to work from home, avoiding contact with the virus and still receiving a steady paycheck. I recognize that not far from where I sit and type this, other mothers do not have this privilege. In a gym-turned-shelter in Ciudad Juarez, Johana, Griselda, and Isabel wait with their children for a chance to seek asylum in the U.S. after fleeing dangerous situations in their home countries of Honduras and Guatemala (Garcia, 2021). The pandemic has made this already difficult process exponentially worse, closing the border, increasing wait times, and exposing refugees "deliberately to conditions of insecurity, to vulnerability, where they can be preyed upon by smugglers and cartels and criminals" (Garcia, 2021). In addition to the dangers associated with seeking asylum, these mothers and their children are forced to live in crowded conditions where they are at increased risk for contracting COVID-19. While my struggles in no way compare to theirs, I relate deeply to the impulse to do whatever is necessary to protect your children.

I acknowledge that we are privileged to have a home to quarantine in, and that many families are currently facing evictions and displacement because of economic hardship brought on by the pandemic. At the same time, it is not healthy for any of us to be trapped in the house this long. During the worst moments of lockdown, my children are struggling at home. They need to go outside and play with other kids. COVID-19 cases begin to go down. The zoo finally reopens and my whole family breathes a sigh of relief. When we walk through the gates for the first time, I can't begin to describe the joy radiating from my three-and-a-half year old son. We have finally gone out into the world. A few weeks later my joy and relief fade. Governor Abbott has revoked the mask mandate. Every outing is marked with extreme anxiety. The zoo is still requiring masks, but when we visit, I see entire families with their masks under their noses, dangling from their ears, under their chins. My

chest tightens. We stop to watch the jaguar drinking water from a pond, and I panic when I see someone standing too close to the wagon where my almost two-year-old daughter sits. My son takes a drink of water, forgets to pull his mask back over his nose, runs over a bridge, through a crowd, and I just start screaming. I feel so much anger. Where is it coming from? As I try to calm myself, I tell my son (and myself) that the reason I got so upset was fear. The zoo is getting too crowded. His mask was not covering his face. I don't feel safe. I don't feel safe. This is what it all boils down to. This is what I try to explain, the best way I can, to my poor three-and-a-half year old. Mami isn't mad at you. Mami yelled because she feels unsafe. Can we please go back home where it's safe? The worst part is, no matter how hard I try to untangle my thoughts, feelings, and gut instincts, I can never tell if my fears are rational and necessary to keep my family safe, or if they are extreme. I know that our minds and bodies were not wired to sustain such prolonged fear and anxiety (Ries, 2021). At the same time, I worry that if I loosen up, will that be the moment we all get the virus I've managed to protect us from for a whole year, thanks to my anxiety-fueled obsessive-compulsive behaviors?

My partner's department chair pressures him to attend more conferences because they are all online this year. All around me, people are filling this time with extra stuff. Extra work. Virtual conferences and lectures. I'm barely able to keep up with my required activities. I am exhausted and so frustrated by this expectation to maintain and, in some cases, increase productivity at this time. I am so privileged to have a job, and to be able to work from home. Both things can be true at once. I can recognize this privilege, and also experience rage about the capitalist expectations that won't let me take a moment's pause and expect uninterrupted productivity during a global pandemic. I wish I could have used this year to pause, to strengthen my bonds with my children as I got extra time at home with them. But, as a tenure-track faculty member, I know all too well what the penalties would have been.

I knew better than to take the one-year tenure clock extension I was offered, because I've seen what happens when mothers add an extra year to their tenure clocks. While pausing the tenure clock is often offered as a means of support for families who take advantage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), some departmental colleagues and college administrators view this period as a research leave, even though written

policies clearly indicate that the year-long extension to the tenure clock is not meant to count towards tenure and promotion (Young & Hines, 2020). When our files for tenure and promotion are reviewed, FMLA (and the accompanying physical and emotional labor) is often glossed over and breaks in our trajectory of productivity are held against us. For example, Espinoza (2020) describes how her university president recommended her for tenure with termination, citing concerns about her lack of productivity compared to the length of her employment history, but failing to realize that she had taken FMLA and received approvals for extensions to her tenure clock.

Women faculty members who take maternity leave are also compared to our male colleagues, who manage to be extremely productive on paternity leave. My maternity leaves were spent at home with my new babies, physically recovering from child birth, struggling through the pain of breastfeeding in endless visits with lactation consultants, and barely able to meet my own basic needs of showering, eating, and sleeping. In contrast, I have watched male colleagues use their paternity leaves to increase their research productivity while their partners took on a majority of the child rearing work. In addition to these differences in physical and emotional labor, women are often perceived negatively for taking advantage of extensions to the tenure clock, while men are rewarded. As Young and Hines (2020) explain:

When their tenure files are reviewed, men benefit from the presumption that they published *and* parented, while the assumption is that female scholars parented *rather than* published. Hence, a gender-neutral policy to support male and female parents actually does more to support male academics.” (p. 77, emphasis in original)

While the blanket COVID-19 tenure clock extension is different, I feel the penalties would end up being the same.

When I’m only able to do the bare minimum, I can’t afford to take an extra year (which will no doubt be unproductive), just to be compared with colleagues who could actually use this time to write. My partner and I split the days. One of us takes the morning 8-12 shift for our academic work of writing, grading, meetings, etc., while the other person solo-parents, often taking the kids out to play in a park or to visit the zoo. From 12-1 we work together to

prepare lunch and get the kids settled for naps. Then we switch, and the other person gets the 1-5 work shift before we stop to make dinner and get the kids ready for bed together. As I type this, and re-read it, it sounds like no big deal. It sounds easy enough. But it never is. I never get enough work done in my four hours. I'm never a good parent when I'm solo parenting. I'm exhausted, stressed, overcome with anxiety and depression. I try so hard to play, to be fun, to not be distracted, to not let them see or feel my fear. I want to just be with them, present, focused, in tune with their needs. I am not enough. I am never enough. This is the message that runs on a loop through my head all day and all night.

On Facebook, I read a post by a former student saying that parents need to stop complaining because no one forced us to have kids. This is true. My partner and I were privileged enough to choose to have both of our children. We did not, however, choose to parent alone in a pandemic. With no childcare. No playdates. No help. While the world around us demanded increased productivity. While internalized capitalism and colonization tried to trick us into seeing our children as a burden. I am ashamed to admit that multiple times during this pandemic I have felt a deep resentment when viewing my children as being in my way, interfering with my "more important" academic work. Writing about traditional indigenous kinship practices, Landry (2020) argues that it's natural to have our children with us as we move through the day.

Everything we did was with, and for, the children. Women had babies on their back, breasts, and hips while they were skinning and tanning hides, gathering water and wood, cooking, harvesting berries and medicine, and everything in between. Older children often stayed with the kokums and moshums to provide that much needed extra support for them. Children learned from our kinship systems. They learned from their mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, kokums, moshums, and older relatives. They learned from the Land by being fully integrated and immersed into most processes and practices. And the idea of children being seen as a disruption to daily living was non-existent. (p. 1)

My children are not a disruption. Caretaking is work too, and it's my most important work. It is natural to be with my children throughout my day. There are many important lessons we can teach each other during this time together. What's unnatural is a system that demands we keep working as if we are not in survival mode during a global pandemic. I am guilty of seeing my children as a disruption to my work, and I refuse to do this any longer. Instead, I see that

my children are guiding me to embrace my coraje; to pay attention to what my rage is trying to teach me, and to find the courage to help us survive and thrive in the pandemic and beyond.

Coraje as Courage: My Niñxs as My Guides

It takes courage to parent through this pandemic. Keeping my kids safe, while I try not to transfer my fears to them. I am met with a memory from early on in the lockdown last spring. One of my comadres was moving away, and so a few of us met in a parking lot where we could stand in a circle, six feet apart, and say goodbye to a family that we played with once a week pre-pandemic. One of my son's friends (who he's been playing with since he was three months old) excitedly walked over to say hi, as this was the first time they had seen each other in three months. My son ran in terror from his friend, hiding behind me, holding onto my legs in fear; "He's getting too close to me mami! No! No! Stay away!" It was heartbreaking and illuminating. In this encounter, my son shined a light so clearly on my need to continue to keep us safe from contracting the virus, while also balancing our need for comunidad. As a young nepantlera, he showed me these pandemic psychological borderlands and I drew from previous crossing experiences to find ways for us to navigate them together.

I know from my life on the border that the harder I try to fit things into neat boxes and categories, the more complex they become. National boundaries. My racial, ethnic, and sexual identities. My son taught me that the same is true of the pandemic; all or nothing strategies won't save us. As nepantleras in this pandemic, we must be alert, read our surroundings, and shapeshift as necessary. Sometimes this means a strict quarantine with no contact with people outside our home. This was true when the cases surged in El Paso, and our need for mobile morgues made national headlines daily. When cases go down, we cross the boundary of our home and spend time with a few family members and a couple of close friends (who have assured us they are taking all the necessary precautions). This pandemic balancing act is exhausting. Lucky for us, we already know how to exist in a perpetual state of nepantla (Anzaldúa, 2007; S. De Los Santos Upton, 2019).

When I forget that the coraje, the anger that resides in my body is trying to teach me something, my children remind me. With their own bodies, they teach me that anger stems from having needs that are unmet (Arreola-Hillenbrand, 2021). I begin to reflect on my needs and do the necessary work

to meet them. I enroll in the Decolonized Nonviolent Parenting Series by Latinx Parenting. Through this course, I begin to do the work to reparent my inner *niña* (Arreola-Hillenbrand, 2020b). What are the things she needed, but was not given permission to ask for? What legacies of colonization have led me to see my children as a barrier to my work? How am I engaging in adult supremacy (Tootoosis, 2020), and how can I dismantle this oppression in my own home? Pandemic parenting remains a struggle, but I keep showing up. When I mess up, I do the work to repair ruptures with my children (Arreola-Hillenbrand, 2020a).

As I write this testimonio, I see that my children are my guides in the reproductive justice work I choose to pursue personally and academically. When I became pregnant with my first born, he gifted me an embodied understanding of reproductive justice beyond the pro-life/pro-choice binary (Hernández & De Los Santos Upton, 2020). I learned how it felt to be disrespected in prenatal healthcare contexts, and the difference it made when providers really *saw* me, *listened* to me, and *held* me during this vulnerable life transition. When we experienced breastfeeding complications that were dangerous for both of us, my son taught me through my body (and his) that lactation consultants are not a luxury. They are a reproductive healthcare necessity, and should be free and accessible to all families. When my daughter was unable to eat from a bottle, she taught me about the need for child-friendly policies at universities and academic conferences. Through my *coraje* (and theirs), my children are currently teaching me to dismantle my own adult supremacy and do the work to fight *chancla* culture. I never knew it before, but they have showed me that this is a key (and largely ignored) reproductive justice issue. They are teaching me that a better way is possible. I didn't have models of my own, but if I can summon enough *coraje* to let them, they will always show me what they need.

Finally, my children teach me that reproductive justice during the pandemic should have involved supporting parents and families. They teach me that reproductive justice can (and should) look like a community of support on the parenting journey, especially during times like these. They teach me that *comadres* play a key role in reproductive justice (S. De Los Santos Upton & Hernández, in press). Following their teachings, I work with my *comadres* to create a small pandemic pod. We commit to taking all necessary precautions to ensure the safety of our families and, in turn, one another, so that our children can play together. I recognize, however, that this is a privilege that is not available to all families (Green, 2020), further demonstrating that these communities of care are an urgent reproductive justice need. My four hours of

solo parenting are no longer alone, and I can feel the collective mental health of my family improving. I collaborate with my comadres (De Los Santos Upton & Hernández, in press), co-authoring to ensure that I am able to make the most of my four hours of work while still producing writing I can be proud of. I am held by comadres at playdates, at work, in my Latinx Parenting cohort. This is how my community supports me during the pandemic. This is reproductive justice at work.

Thank you for reading my testimonio. Thank you for your engaged empathy. Thank you for holding space with compassion and allowing me to speak my silences into existence. My anger remains, but by allowing me the chance to share my experiences of mothering through the pandemic, you, dear reader, have become part of my community and played a role in transforming that anger into courage. As I read through the stories I share in this testimonio, I realize that they may seem boring and insignificant. The tedium of my everyday life parenting through the pandemic. Yet, I write them with as much detail as I can remember to try and document what this moment feels like. My words can never accurately convey the coraje that I feel. The simultaneous rage and courage.

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Re-membering the “Mexican Flu” Pandemic: A Nepantlerx Criticism and Autohistoria

Luis Manuel Andrade

In a recent essay titled “From AIDS to COVID-19: How History has Paved the Way for the U.S. Response to Pandemics,” Karma R. Chávez (2020) describes a historical trajectory of statist violence and policies against marginalized groups during and since the AIDS pandemic. Chávez explains that in the early 1980s, members of the “religious right” supported quarantines that were intended to “[deal] with ‘incurable’ individuals, usually prostitutes, drug users, and gay men—mostly black and of color, or those confined to institutions such as prisons or military barracks” (para. 5). Later in the mid-to late-1980s, politicians proposed and eventually enacted restrictions against people with AIDS, including migrants. Immigration law reforms banned people with HIV or AIDS from migrating to the U.S. up until the 2000s. Why is it important to look at this history? Chávez writes, “AIDS can remind us in the present moment that dangerous disease is always an opportunity to foment anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment” (para. 2). The same author notes, “Knowing these histories can help us to draw from lessons of the past to face the present” (para. 16). Tragically, modern colonial/gender systems haven’t learned from this history; discriminatory policies and anti-immigration rhetoric have (re)appeared during the COVID-19 pandemic as evidenced in former-President Trump’s hateful rhetoric and his administration’s restrictions and policies against Asian communities. The President went as far as calling the COVID-19 the “Chinese virus” and the “Kung flu.” As racist rhetoric and policies arose, so did verbal and physical attacks against Asian persons in cities across the U.S. and abroad.

In this present piece, I wish to add to the history of statist and rhetorical violence against marginalized communities during times of pandemic by describing my experiences of living through the 2009 H1N1 pandemic in my native country, Mexico, and the xenophobic and securitizing logics in media and society that I noticed. I utilize the conceptual framework of nepantlerx criticism (Andrade, 2019b) and methodology of autohistoria (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 578) to help me illustrate health campaigns and restrictions that sustained a demonization of Mexico. Based on events and rhetorical tropes leading up to the international public fear of the H1N1, inappropriately deemed the “Mexican flu,” it is my contention that the xenophobic and securitizing logics

are important to document and “re-member” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 247), a process of piecing together emotional and bodily memories and recollections, given that these logics had significant colonialist consequences on local Mexican communities. Hence, my intention is to blend personal experience, history, and rhetorical analysis to identify and dissect the ways different statist and discursive apparatuses merged to form ideological vilification of Mexicans during the H1N1 pandemic. To clarify, this piece is not an attempt to capture the entire epidemiology and history of the H1N1 and scholars have studied the racism behind H1N1 biopolitical statist campaigns (Mason, 2015; Rutherford & Rutherford, 2013); instead, this piece is an entry into current and past discussions to highlight particularized and embodied experiences of macro- and micro- colonialist processes I witnessed as a nepantlerx in Mexico.

The Power of Nepantlerx Criticism and Autohistoria

I moved to live in Mexico indefinitely in mid-2008 after having lived in the U.S. all my life. I specifically moved in with my mom’s mom in Guadalajara, Jalisco. I was very happy at first, but I slowly became depressed because I frequently felt out-of-place. Why? I missed the family, friends, and romantic partner I left behind in the U.S. My philosophy Bachelor’s degree was not ideal in my search for a job in Mexico. My Spanish grammar and writing was not up to par for Mexican industries. Additionally, I didn’t have any money and, although my grandma and the rest of my family in Guadalajara embraced me with open arms, I soon felt like a leech without a job. As my dad’s mom used to say, “a los 3 días huele el muerto,” or “after 3 days, a corpse smells.” I felt like a corpse after the first few weeks, so I pushed myself to find a job. Eventually, I found a job at an outsourced American corporation. I was incredibly uncomfortable in that space. In fact, in a previous essay in *Border-Lines* titled “A Sojourner, Outsider in an American Corporation in Mexico: A Nepantlerx Criticism,” I discussed my experiences working in the corporation and how I quickly realized its colonialist practices, which tormented me. In the essay, I offered a reflexive conceptual framework of nepantlerx criticism that provides a lens to deconstruct colonialist ideologies and power circuitries in colonial landscapes. A nepantlerx criticism emerges from living in and navigating distinct psychic and geographic borderlands, such as the U.S. and Mexico, and produces a type of alertness, or a heightened awareness, of one’s environment and the socio-political climate. Born from Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of nepantla, rhetorical criticism, and interdisciplinary research, a

nepantlerx criticism is a critical perspective that enables ongoing identification of macro- and micro- practices, such as the strategies of corporations that entrench coloniality (Andrade, 2019b).

At its core, nepantlerx criticism is useful to identify and dissect dangerous ideological power circuits. How? To answer this question, it is important to define ideology and when it becomes dangerous. According to Foss (2004), ideology is a “pattern of beliefs that determines a group’s interpretations of some aspects of the world” (p. 239). Eisenberg and Goodall (2004) explain that ideologies are also ideas that become commonplace and mainstream and they serve to make certain linguistic practices, behaviors, and attitudes seem natural. It is through subtle and overt ways, then, that ideologies become power-ful. As Foucault illustrates, “ideological power is a widespread, intangible network of forces that weaves itself into subtle gestures and intimate utterances” (as quoted in Eisenberg and Goodall, 2004, p. 150). Consequently, ideologies are not neutral and they become dangerous when agents and institutions utilize discourses to centralize power in the hands of a few and marginalize many. Examples of oppressive ideologies include market capitalism, sexism, cisheteronormativity, etc., that become lenses for people to live by and impose on others. The nepantlerx criticism approach intertwines personal experiences and reflections, history, rhetorical analysis, or other useful methodologies with an end goal of mapping the emergence and trajectories of dangerous ideologies within modern/colonial gender systems, such as xenophobia, racism, white supremacy, cisheteronormativity, etc.

Since a nepantlerx is a person that dwells different psychic and geographic borderlands, has potentially faced intersectional oppressions, and may develop hyper-awareness of surrounding oppressive forces, they have unique opportunities to identify, dissect, and deconstruct the ideologies that oppress them in their specific cultural and socio-political contexts. Nepantlerxs often engage in the process of what Anzaldúa (1999) refers to as “re-membering,” a process of piecing together wounds, memories, and methodologies that help them pose and explore ontological and epistemic questions of the Self and identity in the past, present, and future. To “re-member” is to “to translate into language the images arising from your body, the sea, the theater of dreams; to allow them to surface at will; to capture them in your net of words” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 247). To re-member also necessitates investigation of the history of one’s oppression, including the laws, times, and structures that restrict freedom and create what Lisa Flores refers to as racialized “stoppages” to mobility and migration (Flores, 2020). Sadly, many

of these conjurings and recollections are of traumas and wounds from living in colonial landscapes. In other words, the nepantlerx can pinpoint what injures them, including cultural and social ideologies in their homes and surroundings, as a mechanism to write about these experiences and to expose the ideologies we take for granted, but the process can be very painful. A last important note is that re-membering, particularly that which arises during sickness, is often incomplete, fragmented, and nonlinear. As such, my attempts to re-member run the risk of ambiguity and incompleteness.

To re-member is consistent with Anzaldúa's (2002) method of autohistoria. In "now let us shift...the path of conocimiento...inner works, public acts," Anzaldúa defines autohistoria as "a personal essay that theorizes" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 578). Keating (2009) also provides the following definition for Anzaldúa's autohistoria: "Autohistoria-teoría ... [is] theory developed by Anzaldúa to describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on this storytelling process. ... Personal experiences—revised and in other ways redrawn—become a lens with which to reread and rewrite existing cultural stories" (p. 319). Keating's (2009) definition includes the phrase, "autohistoria-teoría," because autohistoria and historical analysis lends itself to the creation of new theories and "cultural critique" from embodied, lived experiences doubly as a way to challenge Western empiricism and methodologies and to validate the cultural phenomenological experiences of marginalized border-dwellers (p. 319). Altogether, the aforementioned descriptions of autohistoria suggest that nepantlerxs can use this reflexive methodology to document our lived realities, confront dominant, colonial ideologies, and, hopefully, create and share new theories that enable healing and spiritual connections with Others. Using nepantlerx criticism as a conceptual framework and autohistoria as a methodology, in the remainder of this essay, I describe the ideological power circuitries, xenophobia, and securitizing logics that emerged when the H1N1 pandemic started.

The Time I Almost Died and The Start of the H1N1

In early 2009, I became incredibly ill. This was the worst sickness I experienced in Mexico. It first started as a dry throat and intense *escalofríos*¹ throughout my body. The cold shivers turned to fever, fatigue, and headaches. A debilitating pain took over my entire body and I became frail, weak, and

¹ cold, shaking shivers

on the verge of a complete bodily shutdown. I became increasingly scared because I felt like this *gripa*,² as my abuelita and aunts called it, was overtaking my body, mind, and soul. I felt like I was going to die, unlike previous times when I caught common colds or flu when I was living in the U.S. None of my grandma and tías’ *sopas de fideo*, *caldos de pollo*, *jarabes*,³ medicines, teas, or rest made me better. Prayers didn’t help. I didn’t—couldn’t—go to the emergency room because one of my aunts, who happened to work for the *Seguro*, the name given to the public healthcare system, advised me that public hospitals were oversaturated. It was hopeless. I was also too poor to afford private medical care. Luckily, I had my own room on the second floor of my abuelita’s humble home (the room that once belonged to my mother when she was a child), so I kept isolated. Perhaps I trusted my body to heal. I also didn’t want others to catch what I had. And my consciousness was barely there. I slept. Endlessly. I wanted to talk to the ghost of my mother, who had passed away from breast cancer in the U.S. in 2005, to tell her that I felt like dying, but she hardly visited me in my dreams. Seeing her die and in constant pain was traumatic for me, but maybe now I could join her in the heavens. What I didn’t realize at the time was that bigger, tougher sickness was coming to Mexico, though my previous malaise prepared me to see the pandemic in a more critical light.

The H1N1 pandemic started in March and April 2009. I’ll never know if my prior sickness was H1N1 flu since I never got tested or went to the hospital. In March/April, doctors and scientists noticed a spike in hospitalizations due to a new flu strain and respiratory tract infections that were spreading, including in youth. In March 2009, the state of Mexico was the only reported state in the entire Mexican Republic that had documented cases of H1N1 and, in early April, Adela María Gutiérrez, a resident of the state of Oaxaca, was the first person to die from the newly identified virus (Lacey & Malkin, 2009). As weeks passed, cases sprung in other states, tourist and coastal regions, and ultimately in Guadalajara, the city I was living in. Based on the quick rate of the spread, the then-President Felipe Calderón coalesced with the Ministry of Health, medical officials, and local states and governments to coordinate their efforts (Córdova-Villalobos et al., 2009). Córdova-Villalobos et al. (2009) explained, “5 days after the epidemiologic alert, the necessary steps were taken to prevent the population from attending crowded places, and the use of the ‘etiquette sneeze’ and frequent hand washing were recommended

² flu

³ aunts’ noodle soups, chicken soup, medicine syrups

as preventive measures” across the country (p. 2). In addition, the President ordered a closure of public spaces, including “religious centers, stadiums, theaters, cinemas, bars, discotheques, that gathered large groups of people” for about two weeks (Córdova-Villalobos et al., 2009, p. 3). Some data suggested that the H1N1 approximately “infected 66,000 Mexicans by the end of 2009 and killed 671” (Felbab-Brown, 2020, para. 2). However, fully accurate data about the transmission rates and deaths from the H1N1 in Mexico was incomplete because, as Lacey and Malkin (2009) pointed out, many Mexicans often avoid(ed) hospitals and health centers and depend(ed) on home remedies similar to the *jarabes* my grandma and aunts gave me. Stigma is perhaps another reason why staying home was a better option than having to risk becoming study specimens for the government or external scientists.

When a national emergency was declared, I became highly concerned because of my family’s well-being and because my only companion, my grandma, was constantly sick. Because of these fears and because I had just experienced an unforgettable health scare, I became increasingly attuned to the statist and rhetorical responses to the H1N1 in Mexico and abroad. It is often during sickness that one is forced to confront precarity, death, and existential dread and may also develop what Anzaldúa (2002) refers to as a *conocimiento*, or consciousness and recognition, of oppressive conditions, where pain and wounds come from, and spiritual connections with others. Hence, in a nepantlerx critical state, I began taking notice of negative ideological rhetorics by different sources and actors in media, commercials, and public health advertisements, as well as domestic and international statist programmatic responses that promoted racist and xenophobic logics.

Scientific Uncertainty, Racist and Xenophobic Logics

“¡Luis, te habla tu papá!”⁴ The loud shouts traveled from the living room in front of the house to the second floor in the back house. Those were the shouts of my fragile grandma, yelling for me to go answer my dad’s telephone calls from the U.S. He would call to check-in on me almost every weekend for an entire year.

I vividly remember my dad’s phone calls from California during the H1N1 pandemic; he was always concerned about my well-being. In addition, he made it seem like we were all sickly, dying, and on the verge of mass death,

⁴ “Luis, your dad is calling!”

based on media reports in the U.S. That surprised me because there were barely any conclusive reports about the pandemic at the time. While some scientific reports indicated that the H1N1 originated in Mexico (Gibbs, Armstrong, & Downie, 2009), others, including one report by the CDC (2009b), stated, “The 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (referred to as ‘swine flu’ early on) was first detected in people in the United States in April 2009” (para. 1). In another early report, Kaplan (2009) argued, “The new H1N1 strain is based primarily on an unusual influenza virus that has been circulating widely in U.S. pigs since the mid-1990s. ... Somehow, a single pig became simultaneously infected with that virus and a pure swine flu strain found in pigs in Europe and Asia” (para. 2). Córdova-Villalobos et al. (2009) explained, “On April 23, the laboratory tests fully identified the virus as influenza A(H1N1) from a virus strain unknown until then, which meant that its behavior, virulence, transmission capacity and origin were all unknown. And initially, even its susceptibility to the available antivirals, the magnitude of the associated risk and its pandemic potential were also unknown” (p. 2). The aforementioned reports revealed that there was undeniable scientific uncertainty about H1N1’s place of origin and, although the virus was a new strain of previous flu, it was mostly an enigma. Still, the media and politicians rushed to negative ideological conclusions.

Almost immediately, international publics began using the “Mexican flu” label, despite the criticisms that the label was discriminatory and prejudicial. On April 27th, 2009, Israeli Health Minister, Yakov Litzman, referred to the virus as the “Mexican flu” because he thought that “swine flu” was offensive to Judaism and Islam (BBC News, 2009; Lopez, 2009). Litzman stated, “We will call it Mexican flu. We won’t call it swine flu” (BBC News, 2009). Other entities, such as the Dutch Outbreak Management team and the Netherlands, adopted the “Mexican flu” label, too (Enserink, 2009). In the U.S., anti-immigrant and conservative groups used the “Mexican flu” and similar labels to promote xenophobic ideology. For example, Padilla and Clinton (2009) found that “radio talk shows ... suggested closing the border, stopping immigration and travel from Mexico, and even that ‘illegal aliens’ are entering the nation with this ‘Mexican’ virus planted by terrorists” (para. 1). Conservative radio host Jay Severin publicly stated, “So now, in addition to venereal disease and the other leading exports of Mexico—women with mustaches and VD—now we have swine flu,” and “We should be, if anything, surprised that Mexico has not visited upon us poxes of more various and serious types already, considering the number of criminaliens [sic] already here” (Scherr & Holthouse, 2009, para. 3). Conservative radio host Neal Boortz referred to the H1N1 as the “fajita flu” and another radio host, Michael

Savage, warned Americans not to go to restaurants operated by undocumented people (Scherr & Holthouse, 2009, para. 3). Savage went on to state, “Go ahead, go and eat in a restaurant now with illegal aliens [sic] all over the kitchen, and you don’t know if they were in Mexico yesterday or two days ago because your wonderful government doesn’t give a rat’s behind who’s in the kitchen or whether they wiped their behind with their hands” (Scherr & Hilthouse, 2009, para. 4). The messages altogether revealed that mainstream publics viewed Mexicans and undocumented people as perpetually virulent, dirty, and menacing and added additional racist scripts, including the view of Mexicans as aliens and criminals. Why were such conservative radio messages and public statements worrisome? As Scherr and Holthouse (2009) explained, the messages were constant, publicly supported, and the “rhetoric ... coincided over the past several years with an apparently dramatic increase in hate crimes targeting Latinos [sic]” (para. 5). Latinxs began facing harassment and businesses and restaurants suffered (Alexander, 2009). The phrases and labels perpetuated negative ideological and xenophobic messages that produced physical, material violence.

When the pandemic started, I was in the process of applying for an international student visa to study a Communication Studies Master’s degree in the U.S., but my anxiety and fear escalated when the American Embassy in Guadalajara, like many other countries, began rejecting visa applications, suspending visa appointments (Reuters Staff, 2009), and canceling domestic and international flights to-and-from Mexico (Bajardi et al., 2011). Countries, including Argentina, China, Cuba, and Peru banned all flights to-and-from Mexico, while others, including the U.S., issued travel warnings not to travel to Mexico (Bajardi et al., 2011; Lacey & Jacobs, 2009). Bajardi et al. (2011) explained that travel warnings, including those by the U.S. and European countries, were sufficient to halt travel to Mexico. Some countries created quarantine zones and containment areas for Mexican residents and visitors, including individuals without symptoms or illness (Associated Press, 2009a; Lacey & Jacobs, 2009). In late April, President Barack Obama declared a national public health emergency and the administration pressured border agents to screen travelers entering the U.S., especially along the U.S.-Mexico border and ports. However, the administration soon received criticism, particularly from Joseph Lieberman, the Chair of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs committee, that not enough was being done to secure the nation. Lieberman and others pressured Janet Napolitano, the Homeland Security Secretary, to intensify border controls and the politicians proposed

to close the border entirely, deploy “thermal imaging scanners at the border,” and create “a special screening program for seasonal farm workers” (Simpson, 2009, para. 5). They viewed farm workers as potential disease threats.

Rhetorical critics and scholars have long identified ideologies of hygiene, health, environmental and public health, national security, and virus as tools to demonize and scapegoat others, as well as to maintain social control (Benjamin, 2000; Campbell, 1992; Dalby, 1999; Heller & Feher, 1994; Livesey, 2002; Luke, 1999; Schell, 1997). Nietzsche critically interrogated the ideology of purity/impurity, which often translates to social demarcations of good and evil (Nietzsche, 1887). Importantly, there is a racist dimension to such ideologies, particularly when diseases are named after or used against specific nationalities, races, or ethnicities, that motivate violence against specific groups. Such naming fortifies racist social imaginaries about people and countries as dirty, contagious, and undesirable (Mason, 2015). The social imaginary becomes a justification to expel, separate, or disavow the humanity of the groups that are targeted. As Campbell (1992) explained, “What has been and remains central to the logic of socio-medical discourse is not the biological nature of disease, but a sense that disease is always from somewhere else. ... The modes of representation [create] groups [that] are marked as social dangers [to] effectively blend and fuse together various stigmata of difference—doubts, concerns, anxieties, and suspicions, to be associated with those groups who are the objects of attention” (p. 86-88). As examples, when the AIDS pandemic started, media and politicians negatively depicted LGBTQ, Black, and “inner-city residents” as threats to the social order (Campbell, 1992, p. 86-88) and Chinese people were scapegoated continuously when the 2003 SARS pandemic started (Reuters, 2003). These populations were dually painted as menacing and continuously left to die. In the instance of the H1N1, entities painted an imaginary of the virus as the “Mexican flu,” which resulted in the devastating consequences across local communities that I will discuss in the next section.

Securitizing Logics and the Deadly Consequences on Local Communities

A few months after I moved to Mexico, one of my cousins must have sensed my sense of unbelonging because he introduced me to one of his gay friends from college to take me out. Meeting people in person was the only way I could meet friends because I didn’t have a cell phone or readily accessible

Internet. Word-of-mouth was my social media. The one gay friend eventually introduced me to other Jotx⁵ friends and they became one of my sources of revitalization and strength. My Jotx friends and I grew close quickly and met at Jotería⁶ bars and clubs in El Centro, or downtown Guadalajara, every weekend where we danced and drank tequila and beers. I lived about an hour from El Centro, but one bus took me there directly. All of us, like millions of people, relied on dozens of buses and trains to travel. I'd go to the Catedral de Guadalajara, arguably the most important religious site in the dead-center of the city, to pray for financial security and a safe return to study in the U.S. and would then head to the Jotería clubs right after. There were so many clubs—for cowboys, bears, lesbians, trans people, *fresas*,⁷ diverse fetish lovers, and many more. While some visited clubs to dance and socialize, others depended on the night life for employment. I often re-member the trans woman that worked as a bartender at my favorite club and spiked my margaritas when I didn't want to drink beer; She was once the winner of a state-wide Pride beauty contest and later became the most popular server at the club. She liked me a lot because I only went to her for drinks and we chatted for hours. She called me "Chulo." People like her thrived in the night scene because of the accepting environment of the club, unlike many sectors of the city that were/are violently transphobic. It's ironic that there is a booming, loud Jotería scene in Guadalajara, the city that was once an epicenter for Spanish colonizers that built massive cathedrals and Catholic churches. Alongside the religiosity and cisheteronormativity spurred the Jotería of the city.

Another way I coped was by taking long strolls through the plazas and artisan shops. El Centro is famous for the endless artisan shops that attract domestic buyers and tourists. Endless is an understatement. Imagine holes in a honeycomb. An infinite amount of locales spot all corners and alleys of El Centro, even next to the massive cathedrals and churches. Clothing, shoes, food, traditional pottery, souvenirs, sex things, and all home goods are found in the shops that line the streets. The smells of fresh foods—*pan*, *carnes*, *dulces*,⁸ etc.—mix with the smells of congestion, gasoline, and sewers. A lovely concoction that I cannot rid from my nose. I often visited the maze-like San Juan de Dios market in El Centro, a massive superstructure that also houses

⁵ Jotx is a Latinx designation for LGBTQ+ persons.

⁶ Jotería is a plural designation for a group of LGBTQ+ persons, as well as an adjective to describe Latinx queer performances.

⁷ Fresas is a term used to refer to rich, snotty people.

⁸ bread, meat, candies

hundreds of tiny shops. I especially loved to eat the *tejuinos*, *dulces de leche y coco*, and *tortas ahogadas*.⁹ I walked through the Plaza de los Mariachis where dozens of musicians played their music and reminded me of my dad’s dad, who happened to be a mariachi all his life. I sometimes visited Tonalá, a city in the outskirts of Guadalajara, which is famous for pottery and artisan crafts. Or if I didn’t want to travel too far, many *tianguis*, or open air markets that are set up on neighborhood streets, would spring up a block away from my grandma’s home on certain days. There, two of my tías sold secondhand clothes and I’d visit them and ate *nieve de pistacho*¹⁰ from the locale next to theirs. Before she died, my great-grandma sold anything she could—food, toys, clothes, etc.—at a nearby *tianguis*, too. *Tianguis* predate colonial times as indigenous people gathered there to trade and sell their goods. The *tianguis* were a primary source of their and my family’s income and survival.

Then, everything stopped when the then-President of Mexico ordered us to stay home and maintain social distance to avoid the spread of the H1N1. Immediately, the small businesses that spotted the entire landscape of Guadalajara closed. This was dire:

Local shops closed.

All transportation ceased.

San Juan de Dios and all *tianguis* closed.

Musicians stopped playing on the streets.

Jotería spaces closed.

Indigenas from rural communities lost their jobs.

My tías lost their sources of income.

Like the rest of the country, Guadalajara became a ghost town. And while the President and his advisors organized to stop the epidemic, locals bore the brunt. Reflecting on the closures mandate, a local worker stated, “the cure will end up being worse than the disease,” (Bremer, 2009, para. 12). One

⁹ Tejuino is a traditional drink made from a mixture of fermented corn, lime, and salt. Dulces de leche y coco are candies made from condensed milk and coconut. A torta ahogada is a traditional sandwich made with bolillo bread, pork carnitas, beans, and drowned in very spicy salsa.

¹⁰ pistachio ice cream

dangerous consequence of the closures was that people immediately began distrusting each other or the government. Brice (2009) reported that people didn't trust the government because of a lack of transparent information about the virus or distribution of masks and sanitizer. In some states, people started "panic buying" water and food (Brice, 2009), and, in at least one case, violence erupted, as evidenced in an event where a group of people in the state of Guerrero attacked a car with license plates from the state of Mexico (Lacey & Jacobs, 2009). Internationally, the World Health Organization established an international mandate for people to avoid all social contact and to cancel public engagements (Matton, 2009). In Egypt and Jordan, people began to slaughter thousands of pigs in farming industries (The Associated Press, 2009b).

Indubitably, local communities faced unprecedented consequences in Mexico and internationally. In Mexico, people that depended on their local sales, including *tianguis* shops, or *Jotería* bars and discotheque workers, did not have these sites to work anymore. In addition, housing-insecure and migrant populations, especially those that migrated from rural communities to urban cities, like Guadalajara, and indigenous peoples in rural areas were overlooked by the government, who did not deliver medicines and vaccines to such communities. According to statistical reports about the H1N1, "Indigenous Peoples suffered flu-related deaths at rates ... greater than other races or ethnicities" in Mexico and across the world (Hansen & Yracheta, 2019, para. 4). Even though the safety and health of everyone seemed to be the government's purpose, financial stimuli from the government did not exist to relieve financial instability. In the U.S., researchers found inequitable distribution of vaccines and resources to Black communities, despite the fact that they were at higher risk of death from H1N1 than white communities (Burger, Reither, Mamlund, & Lim, 2021). Additionally, the U.S. federal response did not account for Latinx migrants; these communities faced a lack of healthcare access, financial instability, and undocumented status that prevented them from seeking medical assistance or preventative care (Schoch-Spana et al., 2010). In addition, the H1N1 "hit American Indians and Alaska natives much harder than all other racial/ethnic populations combined, with overall mortality rates that were 4-fold higher than rates in all other racial and ethnic groups combined" (RT staff, 2009, para. 1). These reports of health disparity were unsurprising given a centuries-long trajectory of exclusion and marginalization of Black, Brown, and indigenous people in medical sectors, extraordinarily during natural disasters and pandemics (Liu & Modir, 2020).

The ideology of securitization is often at the root of exclusion and marginalization of racialized groups. Most dangerous is when ideology becomes the force behind programmatic exclusions, closures, and restrictions to secure the nation from deadly Others (Dalby, 1999). Schell (1997) illustrates that virus discourse is part of “imperialist nightmares that, neutralized under cover of medical common sense, seem to justify exclusionary practices, surveillance, and general prejudice that we would otherwise find inexcusable as well as politically untenable” (p. 97). Interestingly, securitization often happens against international and foreign others, but it also manifests in domestic forms against *any* threats—human and nonhuman—to the wellbeing of the colonial social order. Therefore, during the H1N1 pandemic, Mexico was not exempt from the prototypical securitization against the threat of disease and joined other colonialist countries, like the U.S., in further marginalizing its own. And, it was incredibly traumatic to hear that we, ordinary peoples—my people, grandma, tías, Jotería friends, and others—were security threats to Mexico and the world order writ large. Though my experiences in Mexico were unique to the particularities of the phenomenological moment, undoubtedly, the institutions around me used disease as justification to mistreat and let Black, Brown, indigenous and other peoples to die as has been the case since the start of colonization.

Of What Yesteryear?: A Conclusion

I obtained a student visa from the American Embassy in April or May, 2009, to travel to the U.S. after the fears of the H1N1 pandemic started to subside. I don’t remember the exact date, but I do remember that it happened by mere chance. As the visa carrier confirmed to me, the Embassy had denied dozens of people, including migrant workers, indigenous peoples, and others from traveling to the U.S. because of the virus. I was very lucky. As more time went by, countries eased their restrictions and the H1N1 seemed to become a thing of yesteryear. Until. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in 2020. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt a sense of *déjà vu* because I saw similarities in the statist and public reactions against communities of color as I witnessed during the H1N1 pandemic. I saw Karma Chávez’s (2020) argument come to life: historically during pandemics, specific racialized and minoritized groups become the instant targets of racist and xenophobic rhetorical campaigns. Therefore, to echo Chávez’s (2020) imperative of documenting these particularized histories of violence, I drew from nepantlerx criticism to explain how domestic and international publics fueled the rhetorical, ideological

apparatuses that resulted in further marginalization of my family, day laborers, indigenous people, Jotería, and other communities during the H1N1 pandemic in Mexico and abroad. But what were the specific *conocimientos* (Anzaldúa, 2002) I gained that are relevant to the current moment of the COVID-19 pandemic?

The first thing I noticed was that states responded to the H1N1 and COVID-19 pandemics in similar ways. As soon as the viruses emerged, governments and international agencies declared national and international emergencies and, consequently, parallel public health campaigns promoted the use of face masks, sanitation, and social distancing as the principal tools against the spread of the viruses. Public panic emerged in both pandemics, which caused social performances such as panic buying and distrust against governments and neighbors. Moreover, countries also imposed wholesale restrictions on mobility, whether through travel or public transportation, though, as Flores (2020) previously illustrated, these evidently became racialized restrictions fueled by negative ideologies and securitization against communities of color. In the context of the H1N1, restrictions, including social distancing, were part of a broader, (un)conscious attempt to cause disunity, anxiety, and fear; equate Mexican nationality with disease; and promote exclusion and demonization of my people. In the context of the COVID-19, the Trump administration created racialized stoppages (Flores, 2020) against and promoted negative depictions of people from China. But these restrictions didn't arise out of nowhere—the ideologies of xenophobia and securitization recur throughout time because modern colonial/gender systems seek cultural superiority and dominance by demonizing, expelling, or simply ignoring the needs and humanity of others.

Moreover, I learned that different racialized communities faced similar experiences of marginalization during both pandemics. What were the similarities? First, Black, Brown, and indigenous communities faced disproportionately higher sickness and death and they reported higher rates of trauma and stress than other groups during both pandemics (Liu & Modir, 2020). Secondly, these same groups faced inaccessible and inequitable distribution of sanitizer, protective gear, and vaccines. Liu and Modir (2020) argued that communities of color suffer the most during environmental disasters and pandemics due to historically entrenched structural racism and because of statist failures to assist them. Additionally, although there was scientific uncertainty about the origins of the H1N1 and COVID-19 viruses, politicians, including former President Trump, and mainstream publics perpetuated racist and securitizing rhetorics against specific groups, especially

through racist labels or phrases, such as “Mexican flu,” “Kung Flu” or “China virus.” Such vilification via racist logic had significant material consequences on local communities as Mexican, Latinx, and Asian businesses lost profits and clientele (Kuang, Delawala, & Yang, 2020) and physical violence against them increased. In fact, data from 2020 revealed that “[hate crimes] targeting Asian people rose by nearly 150 percent” across major U.S. cities (Yam, 2021, para. 2-4). According to a study by the Pew Research Center, “About three-in-four Asian Americans (73%) say they have personally experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity” (Ruiz, Edwards, & Lopez, 2021, para. 8). Are these similarities coincidences? Perhaps not. Across time, racialized groups bore the brunt of medical exclusion, statist violence, and discursive tropes that evoked everyday violence against their bodies. It is as if Anzaldúa’s (2009) cautionary foretelling was correct: these colonial landscapes were and may never be truly safe for us.

Despite the similarities, it is also imperative to recognize important differences to avoid amalgamation and conflation of experiences (Soto Vega & Chávez, 2018). As Soto Vega and Chávez (2018) argue, it is important to be attuned to the different “exclusionary colonial and racist logics” that oppress such communities *differently* to avoid false equivalence (p. 319). To start, one key difference between the statist responses during the 2009 H1N1 and COVID-19 was the length of closures. While Mexico shut down businesses and commerce and countries restricted travel for a few weeks during the H1N1, the COVID-19 pandemic caused entire shutdowns and closures that lasted for many months. Unemployment and stay-at-home mandates increased anxiety, poverty, and insecurity in poor and housing-insecure communities during both pandemics, but additional variables made the experiences of living during COVID-19 uniquely oppressive for many racialized groups. For instance, during the lengthy COVID-19 pandemic, violence specifically afflicted racialized groups, including, but not limited to: police brutality against Black communities, deportations and indefinite detentions of migrants, legislation and violence against LGBTQ communities, increased murders of Black and Brown trans persons, and the attacks against Asian communities. The aforementioned occurrences point to different colonialist and xenophobic logics, such as racism, anti-Blackness, xenophobia, cisheteronormativity, classism, and others, that intersected and produced unique and unconflatable oppressive circumstances against the different groups. Phenomenologically, these groups’ experiences were materially and bodily distinct and the oppressions they faced were complex and multifaceted. In all, these racialized and minoritized groups’ experiential differences are incommensurable.

Incommensurability of experiences doesn't mean that solidarity, mutual understanding, communal transformation, or resistance are impossible, particularly during pandemics. To begin to create solidarity, it is vital to share *conocimientos* that dispel the racist myths perpetuated by statist and public campaigns. In doing so, when we talk about pandemics, we shouldn't talk about them in abstracted ways. To do so is to risk overlooking the daily oppressive conditions and deaths of diverse racialized bodies that survived or perished due to violent and dangerous colonialist interventions. Moreover, the analysis of pandemics requires a microscopic and macroscopic look at the ways xenophobic institutions produce psychic and devastating consequences on the people that operate and live in the colonial landscapes. Pandemics don't kill in neutral and monolithic ways; due to xenophobia, racism, coloniality, and other oppressive forces, they perpetually disproportionately affect Black, Brown, indigenous, and minoritized populations. Sharing these *conocimientos* begins a process of affirming that our experiences are similar, yet entirely different. This is powerful because, as Chambers-Letson (2018) argues, it is these differences that enable opportunities to create cross-cultural understandings, tangles, and resistances because we can recognize and continuously strive toward a communal will to live and survive. Furthermore, it is during sickness and when we can see the pain and wounds of Others that we may connect spiritually and holistically to foment communal healing and sociocultural transformation (Andrade, 2019a; Anzaldúa, 2002). As such, it is imperative that nepantlerxs, Black, Brown, and marginalized communities be hyper-critical about the ideologies and state policies that oppress us while also turning to our neighbors of color to understand our mutual, yet different overlapping experiences. It is by uncovering our histories and seeking connections that, at the very least, we can establish spiritual interrelatedness with the communities that face the same conditions across geographical spaces and times.

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Pervasive Borders and Resilient Spirits: Battles in Trans Latina Healthcare Access

Karla M. Padrón

Abstract

In this article, I examine two important and unique documents created by and for transgender Latina (TransLatina) immigrant activists in the TransLatin@ Coalition in order to make visible the challenges that they encounter in the U.S.-based healthcare system. Drawing from The TransVisible Report (2012) and the documentary film, “Dying to be a Woman/Morir por Ser Mujer” (2014)--two sources centering and documenting Transgender Latina healthcare access and treatment, this paper discusses how transgender Latina immigrants confront the healthcare system as an internal border that limits their access to wellness. Here, I also examine how activists within this community advocate and mobilize to create systemic change to enhance the lives of trans migrants. In my analysis, I argue that for many TransLatinas, the border is a continuous and shifting set of barriers that prevent their access to social, emotional, and economic wellbeing. Access to basic human rights such as documentation, employment, education, healthcare, and safety represent not only the main categories for data collection but actual sites of control and dispossession.

As an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies and Gender Women and Sexuality Studies who teaches courses about migration, women of color feminisms, and queer studies, I sometimes take the opportunity to honor my narrative as a queer immigrant of color and to honor my “theory of the flesh.” (I tell my students that since the age of 12, when I migrated to the U.S. from Mexico, I have been nervously thinking about the dangers of getting sick while not having “papers.”) Most of my students of color nod when I communicate this message. But, many of my white students look perplexed and confused. They respond to my narrative in the same manner that some of my students responded to the novel *Bless Me Ultima*, where the young protagonist, Antonio Márez y Luna, is conflicted about his own identity and future career as someone who is navigating the complexity of spirituality and “proper” gendered behavior for a Mexican American boy. “He was too young to have those concerns,” they say. My students, all very attentive (they love personal stories from their professors), believe in the universality of childhood innocence. And I respond to this dynamic in complex ways. On one hand, I am thankful that they want to hold on to the idea that all children no matter where they come from, experience the world through fresh, playful, innocent eyes. On the other hand, I am troubled at the fact that young college students may not understand the nuanced ways in which being queer, undocumented, disabled, short, brown, chubby, with overcrowding teeth may shape one’s sense of self and belonging. I think about how to teach about the loss of youth and innocence that happens when you are racialized and marked as other. I think about how this imposed ‘aging’ is socially constructed. In her poem, “Horse,” queer Chicana theorists, Gloria Anzaldúa, wrote, “the mexicanos mumble, if you’re Mexican, you are born old.” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 129). I don’t know if I was born old, but I can say, once again, that since I was 12, (I am now in my 40s), I have been worried about my immigration and health status and that of those around me. More than being worried, I was called to activism, not by choice but by necessity. The initial passage of California Proposition 187 in 1994, which was originally to restrict undocumented immigrants’ access to health and education, made me acutely aware of how policy and media images shaped discourses of otherness and non-belonging for me and other undocumented folks. Most importantly, I and many other youth, understood that we were vulnerable and unwanted even when many of our parents worked long hours to make their “American Dream” come true. I joined other youth in protests against Proposition 187.

Protests and rallies have been a way of knowing for me. These events have informed me who is in attendance and what motivates them to be there. Immigrants-rights marches protesting racism against migrants and queer-led rallies fighting violence against queer folks of color are largely perceived as two distinct types of endeavors with different populations. But, as a queer immigrant, I have seen the convergence of queer migration politics in immigrant-rights settings and queer-centered spaces. In this paper, I center the voices of Transgender Latina Immigrants, (Trans Latinas hence forth), to examine and analyze their experiences within various U.S. medical establishments. I align my analysis with migration scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Lisa Flores, and Josue David Cisneros to advance the argument that the U.S.-Mexico border is not only a geographic site but also a rhetorical construction that has real, palpable, and often painful consequences for queer migrants of color. In the TransVisible Report, a study that I co-authored with the TransLatin@ Coalition, 101 Trans Latina participants answered questions about their physical and mental health and their behavior and thoughts in seeking medical assistance. I examine their answers to these questions in order to make visible the ways in which the border and its rhetorics is enacted against Trans Latinas and to document how Trans Latinas navigate medical neglect and exclusion. Gloria Anzaldúa theorized that the border was constructed out of the ‘emotional residue of an unnatural boundary.’ (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 25). In examining Trans Latina health narratives, I also notice how the border moves along with Trans Latina bodies leaving behind actual scar tissue, illness, and precariousness.

Theorizing Queer Illegality and Criminality

In *Border Rhetorics*, Robert DeChaine has written about the various and multiple meanings and invocations assigned to the border. To speak of the border as a “powerful rhetorical invention,” he states, “Across all of its invocations, a border operates as a bounding, ordering apparatus, whose primary function is to designate, produce, and regulate difference.” (DeChaine, 2012, Introduction). Queer and Transgender studies scholars such as Talia Bettcher (2007), Francisco Galarte, Dean Spade (2011), and Karma Chávez (2010, 2013) have talked about the power of legal system (cis-tem), to justify the murders of trans women of color. I expand this research by analyzing how transgender women of color experience a slower death within the medical system. Drawing from the TransVisible Report and in-depth interviews, I examine the ways in which clinics and hospitals operate as hostile and

militarized border spaces for many Trans Latinas. In this analysis, I align myself with border studies scholars who have suggested that the border is only found in the Mexico-U.S. territory but also within the institutions of the U.S. where gender identity, race, and immigration status are used as markers for regulation and policing (Ngai, 2004, De Genova, 2005, Flores 2020). As Flores (2020) writes in *Deportable and Disposable: Public Rhetoric and the Making of the “Illegal” Immigrant*, “one’s illegality is presumed to be legally produced at the moment of entry, at the literal border, yet it moves with bodies and across the nation.” (p.27). I examine how the border as a rhetorical invention that produces, mobilizes, and sustains “illegality” functions as a mechanism that shaped Trans Latinas health experiences. A gap that I attempt to address in my research is how these borders are enacted and defied within the medical system. For this particular essay, I center TransLatina voices as they enunciate how they experience medical settings as TransLatina immigrants, the ways in which they mitigate transphobia and racism in order to maintain not just their physical and emotional health but also their integrity and sense of self. Based on the data collected in the TransVisible Report and in-depth interviews that I have gathered about medical encounters, I argue that for TransLatinas the medical system is positioned as a border. One side of this border is a large team of medical specialists who often grant or deny medical services or humane treatment based on their perceived notion of deservingness. Deservingness (Cacho, 2012) is allocated within a racist and transphobic framework that leaves TransLatinas as outsiders.

In my analysis, I argue that for many TransLatinas, the border is a continuous and shifting set of barriers that prevent their access to social, emotional, and economic wellbeing. Access to basic human rights such as documentation, employment, education, healthcare, and safety represent not only the main categories for data collection but actual sites of control and dispossession. Every section of the TransVisible report speaks to the multiple barriers that TransLatinas encounter daily. Nonetheless, with enormous determination and dedication, TransLatina activists mobilize to survive the barriers imposed on themselves and eradicate them for the new generations. Their bodies carry the battle wounds of racist and transphobic encounters with various institutions and from these wounded bodies, they speak and mobilize to demand resources and policies that recognize their humanity.

Positionality and Methods

As a cisgender scholar of color, I am given a level of credibility often denied to transgender people and trans people of color, more specifically. Thus, I take intentional steps to use my location as a queer cisgender Mexicana and immigrant to advance and amplify the voices of transgender Latina immigrants. My efforts are not perfect, but they are sincere, and I do not publish or write about TransLatinas without consulting with and seeking the approval and edits of the members of the TransLatin@ Coalition. The TransLatin@ Coalition is a trusted grassroots organization supporting the rights of transgender immigrants in the U.S. They have an office in Los Angeles, California, where they provide much needed services such as food, counseling, and employment services. Yet, most importantly, they offer a space for joy and dignity, as space to thrive and not simply survive. Bamby Salcedo, the president of this organization, has been advocating for transgender immigrant dignity for many years and she is the driving force behind the making of the TransVisible Report.

Creating the TransVisible Research Team

In 2008, I contacted Bamby and I asked her if she wanted to work on a study about the lives of transgender Latina immigrants with me. One of my main motivations for wanting to make visible TransLatina narratives was that when I was young person working at an L.A.-based HIV community center, I never saw Trans women of color in positions of power even when they constitute one of the most affected groups. I wanted to mobilize my queer, immigrant, and bilingual knowledge to construct knowledge with and for TransLatinas. As a bilingual person with an understanding of queerness and borders, I thought that I could be a bridge transporting knowledge from Trans Latinas to sites where power is situated and decisions about life and made are made. I asked Bamby if she wanted to conduct oral histories with TransLatinas and she said that we needed numbers in order to document and make visible the needs of the community. Yet, we both recognized that we also needed personal stories that told us what these needs meant, how they were experienced, voiced, and battled. With this understanding, Bamby and the rest of the members of the TransLatin@ Coalition,--Ariana Innirritegui-Lint, Brenda Del Rio Gonzalez, Paola Coots, Alexandra Rodriguez, Amelia Vega, Johanna Saavedra, Lesly Monroy, Renata Garcia, Maribel Torres, Alexa Castañón, and, my partner, Darlene Calderon, whom I recruited to help us create the spreadsheet and charts for our data, created the TransVisible Research Team. In 2009, I obtained Internal Review Board (IRB) approval

from the University of Minnesota to conduct research with people over the age of 18 years old who migrated to the U.S. from a Latin American country and who identified as transwomen. We decided to refer to our anonymous research participants as Trans Latinas. From 2009-2013, I collaborated with the TransLatin@ Coalition to construct a survey with 101 Trans Latinas.

We used a community-based-participatory (CBPR) research approach for our study. Nina B. Wallerstein and Bonnie Duran, identify community-based participatory research (CBPR) as a “an alternative research paradigm, which integrates education and social action to improve health and reduce health disparities.” CBPR focuses on “strong relationships between academic and community partners, as well as “co-learning, mutual benefit, and practices that incorporate community theories and participation.”¹ What CBPR meant in every-day practice was that I answered all questions made by members of the TransVisible Team, and I made sure that all aspects of the TransVisible report were approved by the TransVisible Team before it was shared with the public. The Team voted for Bamby to be my co-investigator during the Internal Review Board (IRB) process and all decisions regarding the surveys, and their final presentation in the TransVisible Report were made collectively. This process, although time-consuming was ideal and rewarding. In a later conversation with Salcedo about our approach to the study, and I asked her if she would use this research method again. Salcedo said,

I think that CBPR would be the only research model that I would use because I believe in inclusion. I believe that the people who are being researched should form part of the process throughout and not just for a community to be used and only help the researcher on what the researcher wants, it is a mutual benefit. The community being researched needs to understand how they are going to benefit and how the researcher is also going to use the information that will be collected. In my opinion, at least when it comes to trans women, CBPR is the only model that I believe will be inclusive for our community to be part of the whole.²

¹ Wallerstein, N. & Duran, B. (2006). Using Community Based-Participatory Research to Address Health Disparities. *Health Promotion Practice*, 7(3), 312-323.

² Bamby Salcedo, e-mail message to Karla Padrón, March 15, 2015.

The Significance of the TransVisible Report

The TransVisible report was the first study conducted in the United States that centered the voices and socio-political needs of TransLatinas. There are three key reasons why this study is important to Latinx health communication. The first is that the study was designed and delivered by TransLatinas for TransLatinas. All questions were constructed by members of the TransVisible Research Team and all surveys were conducted by members of the TransVisible Team. My role as researcher was to obtain IRB approval, collect the surveys, and analyze and synthesize them with the support and input of the Trans Visible Team. In other words, it was created within a space of trust and community-building. The second reason that makes this study significant to Latinx health communication is that the survey focuses on a community that is not acknowledged within US census data. Transgender identity is not accounted for within the US census and, often, when folks are undocumented or experiencing houselessness, they are less likely to fill out the census. Lastly, the third reason why this survey matters to Latinx health communication is that it asks questions about migration, criminalization, labor, gender identity, and the need to live an authentic and fulfilling life. These questions, and the answers they elicit, give us a synapse of what it means to migrate in search of gender autonomy and the price that is often paid when policies and social practices do not protect or honor the lives of undocumented transgender people. When discussing the significance of the Trans Visible report with a Latinx media outlet, Bamby Salcedo stated, “I want people to recognize the importance of having a document such as this. No report like this has been written before, and now we have a tool we can use to make changes.” (Unidos US, 2014).

Analyzing Trans Latina Healthcare Access as documented in the TransVisible Report

Trans Latinas expressed a desire to ask and be asked these key questions about access to healthcare, encounters with discrimination, and the relationship between access to mental healthcare and hormones. The chart depicts qualitative data about access. Yet, the TransVisible report also asked open ended and multiple-choice questions to further contextualize access to healthcare.

Question	Yes	No	No answer
1) In the last 12 months, have you had medical exam?	71	23	7
2) Have you been diagnosed with a medical condition	38	59	4
3) Do you have access to employment-based health insurance?	9	91	1
4) Do you have any form of health insurance?	34	64	3
5) Have you ever been discriminated at a clinic on account of your identity?	40	55	5
6) Are you currently seeing a therapist?	31	66	4
7) Have you been diagnosed with a mental health condition?	71	25	5
8) Do you think that female hormones are part of your mental wellbeing?	75	24	2
9) Have you injected any substances to enhance your physical appearance?	55	42	4

From this data, we learned that although the majority of Trans Latina participants had a medical exam in the last 12 months at the time of the survey, forty out of 101 had experienced some type of discrimination at these medical encounters. When asked what took place at the medical setting when they were discriminated, participants shared comments such as, “when you are trans and they see you sitting in the waiting room, they purposefully make you wait longer.” Another participant reported, “they call you by your male name even when you tell them your name.” And, when speaking about what they do when they are feeling ill and have no health insurance, one fifth of participants reported that they keep working even when they are very ill and they do not go to the doctor until it is a “real emergency.” Sixty-one participants reported going to the emergency room when they are very ill. Only nine out of 101 participants reported having employment-based health insurance. Because many of them rely on emergency care or state-issued care where clinics are often understaffed and poorly equipped, most TransLatinas endure inadequate medical treatment. Preventive care is not readily available to them and most postpone treatment until it is no longer possible. One participant shared, “*When I am disrespected at the emergency room or clinic, I do nothing because I am in pain and I need the*

services. I put up with the abuse.” Although medical personnel are expected to deliver ethical and respectful treatment to all patients, discrimination, neglect, and disrespect are commonly reported among TransLatinas.

Mental Health

A key element about the TransVisible report is that it was one of the first studies to ask TransLatinas about their views on mental health and hormones. It is my belief that the TransVisible team created this question to debunk the myth that Latinx communities fear, reject, or misunderstand the importance of mental health. Not only did the majority of participants, (71 out of 101) noted that mental health was importance, but 75 of them associated their need for hormones as part of their mental wellbeing. This is significant because without proper access to healthcare, many TransLatinas in need of hormones secure them within the underground market. In this underground market, customers seeking to enhance their feminine appearance may be given a number of dangerous and potentially lethal substances.

Dying to be a Woman/Morir por ser Mujer

In 2014, The TransLatin@ Coalition, joined forces with the Pan American Health Organization, The Center for Excellence for Transgender Health, and the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, in order to produce a documentary about silicone injections in the transgender community. The documentary featured four transgender women of color who spoke about their desire to enhance their femininity and secure a more curvaceous appearance by getting silicone injections from underground sources that lack proper medical training and knowledge. The film also features Bamby Salcedo speaking as an advocate and an expert in the health issues of transgender people and two medical providers whose work has sometimes called for procedures to undo the harmful consequences of silicone injections. The patients who courageously speak up about the painful outcomes of getting silicone injections and the experts who know their stories very well, all agree that trans women who desired hormone treatment but were unable to access it through the mainstream U.S. healthcare system, opted to use underground methods because their mental health was at stake in the matter. What the speakers share in this documentary is an open and honest conversation about their need to access treatments to get a more curvaceous figure and the risks they have taken with underground practitioners. Some of these practitioners

inject their clients with oils and other substances that have damaging health effects. The speakers in this documentary are seen in medical settings seeking treatment to undo the painful wounds cause by the effects of the injected oils. Echoing the pain of these speakers, one participant in the TransVisible report commented, “I think they injected me with oil and they said that it was silicone. My body has holes and I am in a lot of pain because of it.” The TransLatin@ Coalition and all of the people who participated in the making of this film are creating awareness so that medical personnel and policy makers learn about the vulnerabilities affecting uninsured transgender women of color who need hormones as part of their holistic wellbeing.

Communication and Trans Latina Migration Narratives

TransLatina Immigrants are rarely asked about their migration stories. Most immigration policy makers, employers, and social service providers ignore the reasons that propel Trans people to migrate to the U.S. Ignorance regarding their migration stories is dangerous because it creates a culture where fear and hatred of Trans immigrants is justified at the individual and structural level. This form of ignorance promotes a society where cisgender people, and U.S. citizens in particular, learn to feel superior and more entitled to life than immigrants and gender non-conforming people of color. In turn, Trans immigrants are often denied opportunities that are regularly extended to cisgender people and are often enduring multiple forms of interpersonal and institutional transphobia, transmisogyny, and racism. Their recurrent media portrayal as undocumented workers without agency, and/or criminal deceivers, has had significant consequences in the everyday lives of TransLatina Immigrants. According to the answers provided in this report, most TransLatina Immigrants are exposed to multiple forms of racial and gendered microaggressions.³

³ In 1974, Chester Pierce coined the term Racial Microaggressions to refer to the ‘subtle, stunning, and often traumatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’. Since then, Critical Race Theory (CRT) Scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Williams, Daniel Solórzano, Tara Yosso, and Sylvia Hurtado, among others, have expanded the term to include class, gender, ability, and sexuality, significant sites of analysis to study the myriad ways in which social inequalities and the status quo are sustained through daily insults and nonverbal ‘put downs’ against members of minoritized communities. As a result of these microaggressions, members of minoritized communities feel a ‘diminished sense of confidence’.

Ironically, most of them have made the U.S. their home because they were running away from violence in their native countries. The TransVisible Team wanted to know the reasons behind the migration of TransLatinas. When asked why they migrated, survey participants were able to choose between all, none, or one of the following choices: A) I came to reunite with my family members, B) I came in search of better economic opportunities, C) I came because I was running away from violence. Participants also had an option to write down another reason for migrating or to expand on their answers. One participant shared: “I came because my uncle said he would kill me for being Trans.”⁴ Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents said they were both running away from violence *and* in search of better economic opportunities. Twenty-three (23%) of TransLatinas said running away from violence was their main reason for leaving their country and only two (2%) stated searching for better economic opportunities. Although meta-narrative understandings of Latin American migration patterns often offer narratives of economic need as a primary and/or most prominent reason for coming to the U.S., this report shows that, for TransLatinas, the search for economic opportunities and the need to escape violence were not to be separated as reasons for migrating. For most of the participants, it is important to convey the “interlocking systems of oppressions” that informed their decision to migrate. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hills Collins writes:

Additive models of oppression are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought. One must be either Black or white in such thought systems—persons of ambiguous racial and ethnic identity constantly battle with questions such as “what are you, anyway?” This emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that either/or categories must be ranked. The search for certainty of this sort requires that one side of a dichotomy be privileged while its other is denigrated. Privilege becomes defined in relation to its other. Replacing additive models of oppression with interlocking ones creates possibilities for new paradigms. The significance of seeing race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression is that such an approach fosters a paradigmatic shift of thinking inclusively about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity. Race, class, and gender represent the three systems of oppression that most heav-

⁴ Karla Padrón and Bamby Salcedo, *TransVisible: Transgender Latina Immigrants in U.S. Society*, Los Angeles: The TransLatina Coalition, 2013. <http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/files/news/transvisiblereport.pdf>

ily affect African-American women. But these systems and the economic, political, and ideological conditions that support them may not be the most fundamental oppressions, and they certainly affect many more groups than Black women. Other people of color, Jews, the poor white women, and gays and lesbians have all had similar ideological justifications offered for their subordination. All categories of humans labeled Others have been equated to one another, to animals, and to nature.⁵

Borrowing from Collins's theorization of the interlocking systems of oppression, I posit that most TransLatinas in this report think of their migration stories through a lens of an interlocking systems of oppressions (i.e. racial, economic, and gender violence) and by doing so create a new paradigm for looking at social and legal configurations of refugees and the stateless.

The Border is Everywhere where there is a Barrier to Wellness

Although this paper is specifically focused on the challenges that TransLatinas face when it comes to accessing healthcare, public health professionals as well as lay people recognize that racial and gendered discrimination in education, employment, housing, and food access, and safety all have a direct impact on the type of health resources that a person or community may access. For this reason, the TransVisible Team wanted to document not only the type of healthcare access that participants had, but also their income-earning opportunities. When the TransVisible Team asked participants if the sex industry was their employer, one third of participants responded affirmatively. Speaking about the complex nature of sex work, one participant reported, "we want dignified jobs, we don't want prostitution." Another participant stated, "many of us have to succumb to sex work because in what other way are we going to pay the rent. Not many jobs are available to us." It is worth noting that the Trans Visible team reported that participants were rejecting sex work because it is criminalized, dangerous, and irregular. They experience sex work as dangerous because it is secretive and criminalized and many TransLatina activist have worked to see sex work decriminalized. With little access to proper documentation, mainstream employment, healthcare, and safety, Trans Latinas encounter a series of internal borders and barriers to the life of their dreams, they life they came in search for in the United

⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

States. Yet, despite these barriers, there are many signs of hope on the horizon. The TransLatin@ Coalition works tirelessly to create policies that would break barriers to life chances and wellness.

A Sign of Hope: The Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund

One of their most recent success stories is the passing of AB 2218-Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund. According to a November 2020 TransLatin@ Coalition Press Release, “Starting January 1, 2021, California will begin the process of establishing the Transgender Wellness and Equity Fund within the Department of Public Health, which will be responsible for creating and allocating the resources for TGI-serving organizations across the state. These resources will be able to be utilized for services such as medical health programs, mental health programs, arts-based programming, and supportive housing specifically for TGI people.” Michacé De La Cuadra of the TransLatin@ Coalition, stated, “This bill is a form of accountability to California and other states, for years of neglect of TGI people.”

Conclusion:

Migrant stories, especially those emerging from Trans and Queer bodies are shaped by a long-history of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia. Trans and queer migrants embody and defy an “interlocking systems of oppression.” Sometimes, in order to thrive, trans and queer migrants imagine and create spaces where joy and gender autonomy are possible. Beauty pageants, local groups for and by queer and trans people of color, and social-justice spaces sometimes function as liberatory moments that momentarily suspend the pain and trauma of the border. Yet, in order to understand that daily struggle of survival that shapes Trans Latina lives, we, the students, must come to terms with the fact that for those who are marked as others, for the ones that Anzaldúa called “Los Atravesados,” there is no innocence. The border, with its rhetoric of illegality, confines and punishes its crossers. Innocence and vitality are resources carefully reserved and curated for those who are always already read as “real” Americans. The next time that I teach a class about queer migrations or women of color feminisms, I will tell my students that becoming critical of oppression and understanding how racism, xenophobia, and transphobia affect trans people of color, require that they open themselves to discourses that may make them uncomfortable, that they may feel like they are losing their innocence, and that with this

new critical lens, comes an understanding of what it means for Trans Latinas to live a life of pervasive borders which demands extreme tenacity and a resilient spirit to survive. Beyond a lesson on how Trans Latinas survive these pervasive borders, however, is my desire that people in positions of power, those who make laws or media images create a space that centers the humanity of trans women of color and, in this manner, shifting the social conditions from a constant struggle of “survival mode” as Bamby Salcedo calls it, to a more sustainable way of life where their gender autonomy is valued and respected.

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La Equidad en Tiempos de Pandemia:
**A Case Study of *Promotores* on the Frontlines of COVID-19
Response in Latinx Communities in Orange County,
California**

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Abstract

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted Latinx communities and other communities of color. *Potomoroos de salud* (community health workers) have been proposed as a critical workforce to respond to the pandemic in these communities, yet there is limited knowledge about the work of *promotores* on the frontlines. This article presents a case study of Latino Health Access' response to COVID-19 in Latinx communities of Orange County, California, where *promotores* have operationalized equity by activating and aligning health systems to respond swiftly, while leading upstream solutions to address social inequities that exacerbate the pandemic's impact. Lessons from this case study can guide future efforts in COVID-19 response, including vaccine rollout, and long-term rebuilding. The case study also presents novel roles for *promotores* in advancing health equity, underscoring the importance of a dual-pronged approach: providing direct services while simultaneously mobilizing the community in long-term transformation.

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communities of color during a time in which so much has been lost. Phase 1 of LHA's COVID-19 Response was made possible by contributions from The California Endowment, the California Health Care Foundation, Novartis, the OC Community Resilience Fund, and the Keith and Judy Swayne Family Foundation Fund.

Keywords: Equity response to COVID-19; Community COVID-19 response; Health equity and COVID-19; Promotores and COVID-19; COVID-19 in Latino communities

Introduction

Working-class Latinx and other communities of color in the United States have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and its social and economic impact (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Systemic disinvestment, lack of opportunity, and racist policies and practices exacerbate health and social disparities for these communities, creating a perfect storm for COVID-19 infections and limited infrastructure for response (Berkowitz et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2020; Gravlee, 2020). Latinx individuals comprise the core base of the essential workforce in industries such as service and hospitality, manufacturing, and farming, and are less likely to have the option of working from home (McClure et al., 2020; Gould & Shierholz, 2020; Quandt et al., 2020). Latinx communities also experience higher rates of chronic disease, placing them at greater risk of COVID-19 (Macias et al., 2020). As the disparities in COVID-19-related morbidity are expected to widen, the pandemic response necessitates an equity framework, one that invests in the communities that have been most impacted by the pandemic and leverages upstream strategies centered around the experiences of these very communities. Emerging literature indicates some attempts at addressing COVID-19 from an equity perspective, but solutions are still being developed and tested (McLoughlin et al., 2020; Nouri et al., 2020; Baquero et al., 2020; Alberti et al., 2020; Landers et al., 2020).

Promotores de salud, community health workers (CHWs), have been essential in generating effective community responses in working-class communities of color, where—with few exceptions—health systems do not reach residents. They have been among the frontline workers to respond to disease outbreaks and disaster relief in developing countries and in historically neglected communities in the United States (Cellesti et al., 2010; Fredricks et al., 2017; Nunes, 2020). As such, the CHW model has been proposed as a key strategy for COVID-19 response (Ballard et al., 2020; Goldfield et al., 2020). In the United States, there are an estimated 54,760 CHWs (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), many of whom have direct access and trusted relationships in working-class communities of color. This workforce presents a unique opportunity to organize an effective pandemic response, given their demonstrated success in health communication with Latinx communities (Elder et al., 2009), yet the public health field has limited empirical support as to how *promotores* have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in the United

States (e.g. Campos-Dominguez & Rumana, 2020). There is also a gap in existing knowledge about the ways in which *promotores*' work contributes to equity in pandemic response in impacted communities.

The purpose of this article is to present a case study of Latino Health Access' (LHA) *promotor*-led Latinx COVID-19 Equity Initiative, implemented in Santa Ana and Anaheim, California. Leveraging an adapted Pathways to Population Health Framework (Saha Stout et al., 2017), the article highlights the ways that *promotores*' actions and advocacy drive equity in accessing care. Lessons from this case study can serve as a foundation for ongoing response and recovery efforts that advance health equity in working-class, Latinx and immigrant communities, as these communities seek to respond to new COVID-19 surges, link communities to vaccines, and recover from the pandemic over the long term. The authors have chosen to use the gender-neutral term "Latinx" as the primary ethnic identification, as opposed to Hispanic or Latino/a, for purposes of inclusivity. As Catalina de Onís (2017) notes, "language serves as an indispensable resource for imagining and enacting more just, livable communities," and as such, Latinx moves away from the gender binary imposed by Latino/a.

COVID-19 in Latinx Communities in Orange County

Like in other parts of the nation, in Orange County, California, the pandemic has disproportionately affected communities already experiencing high levels of social vulnerabilities due to decades of disinvestment and inequitable policies (Garcia et al., 2020). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Orange County's Healthier Together), Orange County is 34% Latinx, with the largest Latinx communities in Santa Ana (77.3%) and Anaheim (52.9%), where 81.4% and 61.5% of individuals speak a language other than English at home, respectively, and social needs abound. The rates of individuals living below the federal poverty line are significantly higher in Santa Ana (21.2%) and Anaheim (16.0%) than Orange County as a whole (11.5%). Low housing stock and limited economic opportunity for predominantly immigrant communities creates conditions by which 64.9% of Santa Ana residents and 61.6% of Anaheim residents spend more than 30% of their household income on rent (Census Bureau, 2020). Housing costs also drive household density, increasing COVID-19 risk because of the inability to self-isolate in the home. In late June 2021, there were 255,977 cumulative COVID-19 cases, with a rate of 19 daily positive cases received. Nearly half of all reported cases (47.15%) are among the Latinx population, the greatest disparity among any other ethnic

group, given that Latinx residents make up only 35.0% of the Orange County population. Cumulative COVID-19 deaths are at 5,111, with 38.27% being among Latinx residents (OC Health Care Agency, 2020).

Overview of Latino Health Access

Latino Health Access is a public health organization with a 28-year history of partnering with working-class Latinx residents in Orange County, California, to implement high-impact health programming and upstream strategies to address health disparities. Programs are facilitated by a core group of 40 paid *promotores*. All *promotores* are recruited from the community and were, themselves, program participants who demonstrated growth along a continuum of participation (Bracho et al., 2016) and interest in serving their community or taking additional leadership roles in health promotion and advocacy. *Promotores* are trained to develop specialized skills in chronic disease management, mental health prevention, and early intervention, and community advocacy. *Promotores* accompany program participants in making health improvements while simultaneously engaging them in long-term community transformation. Participants are predominantly female (72%), aged 18 or older (71%), Latinx (98%), and report speaking Spanish most of the time (90%). The majority report earning less than \$30,000 per year (85%), and nearly half of the adults report not having health insurance (46%).

LHA anchors its work in Freire's concepts of education and power (Freire, 2000), where discussions of power and agency are precursors to addressing social structures, racism, and other root causes of health disparities. *Promotores* are trained in community-engaged methodologies, including Freire's concepts of popular education, which links reflection and action, with the process of education generating social change at the local level (Beder, 1996; Bracho, 2002). Participants are regarded as experts in their own life and as a central component of the health improvement team (Bracho et al., 2016). The organization is guided by twenty principles of practice rooted in equity and social justice and the fundamental belief that "participation makes a difference" (Bracho et al., 2016, p. 5). While the organization is swift in responding to immediate health concerns and disparities impacting working-class Latinx communities, it simultaneously builds the mechanisms by which every program participant is invited to resolve the conditions that create health disparities in the first place.

Conceptual Framework

Due to their proximity to the community, LHA’s promotores informed the adaptation of the Pathways to Population Health Framework (Saha Sout et al., 2017) to create a COVID-19 response (**Figure 1**) that prioritized the needs of the communities most impacted by the pandemic as the cases increased. This process aligns well with existing theoretical and practice-based models for leveraging community-based participatory models in public health for equitable outcomes (Bracho et al., 2016; Wallerstein, Duran, Oetzel, Minkler, 2017). LHA’s equity-driven response is centered around (1) activating and aligning the health system to increase direct COVID-19 frontline response as well as addressing the community’s social needs affecting physical/mental health and social well-being and (2) community well-being creation to create systems-level change, addressing upstream social determinants of health.

Figure 1.

Latino Health Access’ Adapted Pathways to Community Health Model.



Legend: Services are categorized as New (N), Adapted (A) and Expanded (E) Services.

LHA activated the local health care agency to align its resources to deploy testing and coordinate across systems and organizations to meet increasing social needs within the community. Alone, the local healthcare

agency faced competing pressure from constituents to restart local economies (Smith, Weber & Barry-Jester, 2020; Santana, 2020), despite evidence-based guidelines for COVID-19 prevention and knowledge of infection trends among working-class Latinx communities. LHA advocated for publication of zip code-based COVID-19 data and prioritization of impacted geographic areas in the local pandemic response. It also worked with the county to define collective outcomes around testing, prevention, and connections to healthcare and social services through partner organizations.

Once these systems-level actors mobilized resources to build a response infrastructure, LHA's *promotores* imbued equity in the response through a community well-being approach that included: (1) deploying short-term direct services and (2) creating communities of solutions (Saha Stout et al., 2017) through policy advocacy and systems change. These *promotor*-led strategies included new services and enhancements or modifications to existing services (e.g., chronic disease management and emotional wellness programming, health education, tenant counseling, nutrition assistance) to ensure that there was no gap in care for program participants and that new needs were met (see **Figure 1**). *Promotores* also organized policy advocacy campaigns to increase tenant protections, community capacity-building through leadership skills trainings, and power-building civic engagement campaigns that would amplify community voice in asking for access to testing, healthcare services, and comprehensive response to the economic and social impact of the pandemic. Policy advocacy is one of LHA's principal strategies to address the social determinants of health at the community level (Healthy People, 2020). *Promotores*, then, become the drivers of equity through upstream initiatives that create long-term community transformation that is integrated in the COVID-19 response. Their willingness and courage to work on the frontlines—and even demanding that it be done—when systems shut down reminded us that responding with equity means responding with urgency, grit, and compassion at a time when others kept their distance.

Methods

Design and Setting

This study uses a descriptive case study design, which describes an intervention in its context, using multiple data sources, and is often used for the purposes of program evaluation and intervention development (Baxter &

Jack, 2008). Case studies are ideal for understanding issues within a particular context and afford close collaboration between researchers and participants (Baxter & Jack, 2008), both of which align with LHA's efforts to address the community's social realities and center the lived experiences of its participants. As such, this case study examines the role of *promotores* in operationalizing the equity framework in LHA's Latinx COVID-19 Equity Initiative.

Procedure

Phase 1 of the COVID-19 Equity Initiative extended from March-June 2020, during which LHA *promotores* collaborated with the internal evaluation department to develop a *guión colectivo*, a collective script and screening tool, to understand (a) knowledge of COVID-19 prevention, (b) ability to take preventive measures, and (c) the impact of COVID-19 on a range of social structures (e.g. employment, housing, food insecurity, civic engagement) among Latinx Orange County residents. LHA *promotores* then proactively phone banked 2,254 community members during this time.

Leveraging results from the initial project phase, LHA's "Latinx COVID-19 Equity Initiative" (phase 2 of the project) began on June 29, 2020. With funding from the local healthcare agency, *promotores* focused LHA's response efforts in eight of the most impacted zip codes in Santa Ana and Anaheim. Through this initiative, *promotores* established a COVID-19 command center to coordinate all activities and operate a call center, where community members could receive testing information, referrals to social services and health care, and brief prevention education.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the program were initially collected and reported through Excel spreadsheets that tracked responses to the *guión colectivo*. Twenty-six *promotores* participated in Phase 1 of the initiative and provided services to 1,950 participants from March to June 2020. Data on education dissemination and service utilization were tracked via Google Forms and Google Voice; at the same time, *promotores* transitioned from paper-based documentation to electronic forms, where data were captured in a Microsoft Access-based database (JABR). Data collected were tabulated bi-weekly and leveraged to identify patterns of impact, refine services, allocate existing organizational funding, and request additional funding from philanthropic partners. The lead

author also derived qualitative data from twenty-seven hand-written pages of programmatic meeting notes, staff presentations, COVID-19 program planning meetings, work plans with county stakeholders, and debriefing meetings with key stakeholders including *promotores* and program coordinators. Qualitative data were coded through a two-step process of finding emergent codes from the data and then applying the theoretical conceptual framework to develop themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016).

To assess alignment with the framework, an inventory of the key COVID-19 response activities implemented by LHA was developed. Activities were categorized into the four key outcomes of the two equity strategies (activating and aligning health system and community well-being creation) of the theoretical framework: (1) physical and mental health, (2) social well-being, (3) community health and well-being, and (4) communities of solutions (**Figure 1**). Thereafter, service utilization data were analyzed to measure changes in social needs and referral patterns, followed by focus groups with *promotores* to identify the actions *promotores* took to ensure to services by residents in the areas most impacted and the enhancements that were incorporated into the COVID-19 response strategy. Data were aligned with the tenets of the theoretical framework and discussed with three LHA *promotoras*, who contextualized the actions of the COVID-19 pandemic response within their broader goal of engaging residents in addressing inequity and advancing social justice. Engaging residents is at the heart of LHA's work because they are seldom engaged in political processes (either due to ineligibility or structural barriers) that provide a sense of agency (Bracho, 2002). Guided by Freire's popular education, LHA *promotores* create spaces where participants develop critical consciousness and build advocacy skills that allow them to take part and witness how their participation and engagement results in some tangible change (Bracho, 2002). This fosters empowerment, while working towards systems-level change to address entrenched social inequities.

Results

The results in Table 1 show the equity outcomes that result from *promotor*-led actions. The discussion provides additional detail and examples of the contexts of these actions and why they are critical to build equity. LHA conceptualizes an equity approach to health as one that prioritizes populations most affected by structural violence and health disparities and engages them in the development of strategies to respond to their immediate needs and the structural roots of such inequities.

Equity Strategies	Areas of Impact	Promotor Actions	Equity Outcome	
Activating and Aligning Health and Social Services Systems	Physical and/or Mental Health	Uplifting community stories, concerns, and barriers from impacted neighborhoods to system-wide actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successful publishing of COVID-19 zip code data ● Prioritization of response activities in impacted zip codes ● County-funded hotel rooms for self-isolation ● Formation of County COVID-19 Equity Steering Committee 	
		Identifying and documenting testing gaps and barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased testing in communities to bridge gaps in testing deserts 	
		Identifying, training and mobilizing community members from impacted zip codes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased frontline staff by onboarding and deploying new promotores from the community to lead outreach and education ● Creation of new community support groups focused on processing grief and adjusting to life in the pandemic (promotores and MFT co-facilitated). 	
	Social Well-Being	Co-developing COVID-19 screening tool to assess prevention readiness and social needs	Helping residents overcome barriers to external service access and utilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Data-driven investments in key areas of response (e.g. food distribution, rental assistance) ● Creation of community-informed communications materials for dissemination to combat lack of information ● Launch and expansion of outreach in most impacted Zip Codes, where no outreach previously existed ● Increased availability of prevention equipment in shortage areas through distribution of toolkits that included masks, sanitizers and educational material
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Successfully connected community members to eviction relief and rental assistance ● Connected undocumented community to financial relief
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prevented gaps in care for individuals living with chronic disease ● Successful implementation of self-isolation plans for high-density households ● Connected isolated older adults to no-contact food delivery
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prevented gaps in care for individuals living with chronic disease ● Successful implementation of self-isolation plans for high-density households ● Connected isolated older adults to no-contact food delivery

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Community Health and Well-being	Community Health & Well-Being	Leverage popular education to deliver culturally appropriate information through a variety of methods (e.g. skits, songs, videos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culturally appropriate information campaigns—as developed by community members for community—to combat misinformation and lack of information ● Increased rapid communication infrastructure in Latinx communities
		Advocacy for essential services within LHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expansion of food distribution project, despite original suggestion by LHA administration to shut down due to safety concerns ● New implementation of a diaper distribution during weekly food distribution program to meet need
	Communities of Solutions	Distilling and communicating policy to residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased community knowledge of their rights (housing, COVID-19 testing for undocumented immigrants)
		Build community capacity for policy advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing community-led eviction rapid response ● Successful mobilization of hard-to-count communities to complete the Census ● Increased civic engagement and readiness to vote among infrequent voters despite pandemic limitations and changes ● Creation of resident-led COVID-19 advocacy network ● Increased community participation in virtual City Council meetings to advocate for resident protections ● Implementation and extensions of eviction moratoriums at local level to strengthen state guidelines
		Organizing promotor wellness program with appropriate mental health support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sustainability of COVID-19 promotor workforce ● Economic development integrated into response through hiring and training new promotores at a time where community experienced job loss

Operationalizing Equity in Activating and Aligning Health Systems

La equidad en tiempos de pandemia significa hacerle ver la realidad que vive nuestra comunidad a los sistemas que no tienen raíces, ni ojos, ni oídos en ella. Al mismo tiempo nuestro rol como promotores es estar ahí para la comunidad, estar presente aun en la distancia.

Equity in the times of the pandemic means to make the systems see the reality experienced by our community because they don't have roots or eyes or ears within it. At the same time, our role as *promotores* is being there for the community, being present even during social distancing.

--Sarai, LHA *Lead Promotora*

In the COVID-19 pandemic response, *promotores* mobilized to achieve equity within larger systems that originally failed to respond to the pandemic equitably. While *promotores* quickly saw the pandemic entering working class Latinx communities, the impact of the pandemic in these neighborhoods could not be quantified in the absence of zip code-level data, a significant barrier in organizing a response. *Promotores'* pulse on the evolving nature of the pandemic in the community drove LHA to mobilize an existing community roundtable that not only resulted in the publication of zip code-level data but also mounted a response in highly impacted geographic areas. Table 1 summarizes the *promotor-led* actions that advanced equity in LHA's response.

As the data in Table 1 show, community health in the times of COVID-19 required more than understanding where infection rates were increasing exponentially and deploying a small-scale response. To integrate equity into system-level actions that address the community's physical health and social well-being, *promotores* served the key functions of (1) representing the community's lived reality and existing gaps in COVID-19 information, testing, and healthcare services; (2) advocating for resource allocation and infrastructure to fill existing gaps across health and social services; (3) serving as cultural and linguistic brokers to facilitate the development of effective prevention messaging deployed by the health system; (4) multiplying community leadership and capacity to serve on the frontlines of the response; and (5) accompanying the community through the process of accessing services and addressing barriers to utilization and providing the moral support individuals need throughout the process.

Despite political pressures (Santana, 2020), LHA's mobilization successfully secured the support of the local healthcare agency, which invested in building infrastructure for an equity response—a response that prioritizes those most affected and engages them in developing strategies that address immediate needs *and* root causes of disparities. LHA hired and trained an additional eighty-eight *promotores* who were deployed to conduct direct outreach in the most affected geographic areas of Santa Ana and Anaheim, determined by data that the county made publicly available following LHA's advocacy. Through *promotor* coordination, the local healthcare agency and community clinic partners scaled testing within highly impacted communities, which helped address transportation barriers. *Promotores* served as the trusted faces of the testing process, a process marked by fear of losing jobs if they were to test positive and of the impacts of receiving a test on their future immigration relief prospects, given the ongoing public charge changes at the time (see: Haq et al., 2020).

Promotores fiercely advocated for alignment between health and social services, with one *promotora*, during a planning meeting, warning against “opening Pandora's box” by going into communities without a plan to address the issues that would be identified with increased outreach and testing. *Promotores*, by virtue of their role, go beyond making referrals to partner agencies; they actively seek out the most marginalized communities (e.g., undocumented immigrants, monolingual Spanish-speakers, elderly) that are often unreached by the health system *and* ensure that interventions are tailored to their particular health and social vulnerabilities. For example, when local governments announced funds for rental assistance, *promotores* organized a financial assistance program leveraging private funds for undocumented community members and other individuals who were ineligible for publicly funded financial aid. When local governments merely opened up an electronic application process, *promotores* embedded equity in the process by assisting individuals with limited digital skills or limited internet access in applying.

Operationalizing Equity in *Promotor*-Led Programming and Upstream Strategies

COVID visibilizó los fracasos de los sistemas en proveer para la comunidad equitativamente. Es la responsabilidad del promotor ir más allá de dar servicios. Tenemos que crear conciencia crítica de cómo

la inequidad se perpetúa al quitarle el poder a la comunidad, pero también tenemos que crear espacios para que la comunidad participe con nosotros en hacer cambios y crear una gama de posibilidades.

COVID only made visible the ways in which systems failed to provide for the community with equity. It is the responsibility of *promotores* to go beyond direct services. We have to be critically aware of the ways in which inequity is perpetuated by taking away power from the community, but we also have to create the spaces for the community to participate with us in changing this and creating an array of possibilities.

--Laura, LHA *Promotora Coordinator*

Beyond aligning broader systems, LHA *promotores* organized and mobilized to foster community well-being by re-envisioning its service delivery and building the roadmap for equitable response and recovery through policy and systems change to sustain health over the long-term (Table 1). While *promotores* implemented key activities of community health and well-being prior to COVID-19 (e.g. health promotion and disease prevention, chronic disease management, and emotional wellness services), responding to the pandemic with equity required *promotor*-led innovation in advocacy and planning to ensure safety and cultural/linguistic alignment of prevention efforts. During the first phase of LHA's COVID-19 response, 20% (341/1,709) responded they did not know what to do if COVID-19 symptoms were present in their household, and 59.3% (989/1,667) responded that they did not have space to isolate in the home. Rather than distributing general information about symptoms, *promotores* created messaging in partnership with residents and youth developing social media campaigns, songs, and images that would resonate with community members, thereby increasing the effectiveness of the information. In addition, *promotores* coached individuals living in multi-family homes through one-time phone calls to ensure the safety of the household when one member experienced symptoms (Phase 1) and ultimately connected individuals to county-sponsored self-isolation rooms after the alignment of the local health system response (Phase 2).

Promotores' pulse on the community informed LHA operations. When LHA's administration proposed closing down the food distribution, *promotores* presented stories of the impact of the food distribution, corroborated by data that show rising food insecurity among those served by the program. Beyond ensuring the continuity of food distribution, *promotores* recognized that over

half of the population in the priority geographic range does not own a car, and as such, designed the operation as a walk-through distribution. While maintaining referrals to health and social services, *promotores* also prepared community members for their telehealth appointments through telephone calls to provide an overview of how to connect and what the telehealth visit would be like, –a vital service for those with limited digital skills and/or access– thereby bridging gaps in health and social service access for the community.

Equally significant is the investment in long-term strategies that will create communities of solutions. The 2020 Presidential Election and the decennial Census provided two urgent causes for mobilizing communities impacted by COVID-19 and those communities neglected in policies and investments. *Promotores* integrated civic engagement outreach with COVID-19 messaging and motivated community residents to participate in civic processes, such as voting and completing the Census, in an effort to advance equitable policies in the pandemic response and recovery. They mobilized community members, including those ineligible to vote, to attend and speak at virtual city council meetings on the importance of adopting a local eviction moratorium and other rental assistance policies when the State’s order was insufficient. *Promotores* were, thus, engaged in both civic outreach and advocacy, providing direct services and building mechanisms for residents’ voices to be heard as part of public strategies to respond to the pandemic.

Capacity building was a crucial task of LHA *promotores* to respond to the various social needs exacerbated by the Pandemic. *Promotores* trained an additional 24 *Consejeros de Vivienda*, housing counselors through a workshop series developed through funding from the Kresge Foundation. Housing counselors were selected from among community members who experienced housing insecurity and had experience navigating multiple systems. Once trained to coach and accompany other community members, they mobilized to respond to the rising threat of evictions in predominantly immigrant neighborhoods, despite local protections. While cities created funds to support rent and mortgage payments, they did not offer support for non-English speakers in completing the forms, making these funds largely inaccessible to certain communities. In response, *promotores* prepared template letters to landlords, as stipulated by city fund guidelines, for all individuals who requested them during an outreach call. In addition, *promotores* facilitated collaborative workgroups where community members outlined policy advocacy agendas. These efforts highlight new roles beyond health promotion for *promotores*,

centered around building community capacity for self-advocacy and integrating civic engagement as an indispensable component of sustaining long-term, equitable community solutions.

Recommendations and Conclusions

This article discusses a case study of Latino Health Access' COVID-19 Latino Equity Initiative. The *promotor*-led pandemic response included activities that activated and aligned the health system to increase COVID-19 prevention and testing while connecting community residents to social services that met the growing economic need. It also included a combination of *promotor*-facilitated direct services, in conjunction with upstream initiatives, to foster community well-being through active participation and engagement. Aligning system-level actors that can invest financial resources and healthcare infrastructure in most impacted communities is necessary to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, yet it is the partnership with *promotores* and other community residents that ensures equity in response. *Promotores* are deeply embedded within hard-to-reach and historically marginalized communities, giving them direct and real-time insight of the experiences of community members (Waitzkin et al., 2011). LHA's pandemic response initiative also shows that *promotores* can mobilize community members around systemic health issues while accompanying participants to meet their immediate needs.

This type of response is essential to reduce COVID-19 transmission and also create the infrastructure necessary for long-term recovery. Lessons from this case study can be applied in the next phase of COVID-19 response, as vaccine deployment is organized throughout the United States. Most immediately, *promotores* can be central partners in helping to understand the community's perspectives on vaccines, such as distrust, which can inform (1) organization of vaccine infrastructure that reaches the hardest-hit communities and (2) effective messaging on vaccine safety, both of which are necessary to strengthen institutional trustworthiness in vaccine development and deployment (Warren et al., 2020). LHA is also well positioned to expand accessibility to vaccines for vulnerable Latinx communities by using effective, community-generated approaches to link clients to health services. As vaccine rollout continues, centralized communications strategies become all the more necessary, providing information on vaccine sites, vaccine administration timeline, testing, costs, and side effects. Information on COVID-19 testing and related resources, thus far, has been disjointed and cumbersome to navigate, and LHA's call center underscores the importance of streamlining

information about COVID-19 into ‘resource hubs’ in a way that is culturally and linguistically accessible, a task that has largely been left to organizations that are rooted in communities.

LHA’s model of hiring, training, and deploying nearly 90 new *promotores* also serves as a model of investment in workforce development in communities of color that achieves a double aim of addressing massive economic loss while fulfilling a public health need. The impact of COVID-19 will leave deep scars in working-class communities of color, where residents mourn the loss of loved ones, the loss of jobs, and a deep loss of stability, leaving a long-road ahead for recovery. The pandemic has highlighted the entrenched social determinants of health in these communities as a result of historic disinvestment and exclusion. This study calls for a new framework for re-building: one that focuses not only on the deployment of direct services to fill immediate needs but also on mobilizing communities as key stakeholders in strategies to advance health equity over the long-term.

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**Book Review: Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro:
Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality**
By Gloria Anzaldúa; Edited by AnaLouise Keating

Sergio A. Gonzalez

In *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, Gloria Anzaldúa continues to set the tone for the formation of transformative pedagogy. Widely known for other works such as *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, and *This Bridge We Call Home* to name a few, Anzaldúa has long paved the way for the reimagining of feminism, epistemology, aesthetics, ontology, critical race studies, jotería, queer studies, etc. Birthing as an unfinished dissertation, *Light in the Dark* was Anzaldúa's final book. Notably, *Light in the Dark* was posthumously published in 2015 by Editor AnaLouise Keating. This book reveals the meticulous approach in which Keating took to ensure a comprehensive review of Anzaldúa's last work. From the notes on the manuscript's development, unfinished sections, appendixes enclosing alternate openings, Keating (2015) illuminates how "In rewriting narratives of identity, nationalism, ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexuality, and aesthetics, [Anzaldúa] attempt[s] to show (and not just tell) how transformation happens" (p. 7).

Light in the Dark is composed of a preface and six chapters and while they are unique in many ways, the interwovenness of Anzaldúa's creative process makes it all come together. Chapter 1, "Let us be the Healing of the Wound: The Coyolxauhqui Imperative-La Sombra y El Sueño", for me, sets the stage by connecting to the current global pandemic as Anzaldúa (2015) states, "Chaotic disruptions, violence, and death [COVID-19] catapult us into the Coyolxauhqui state of dissociation and fragmentation that characterizes our times" (p. 17). As I read in disbelief, I cannot help but make connections to COVID-19, which forced many people across the U.S. in March 2020, to move to a remote way of life in isolation. Furthermore, amid a global pandemic, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American male, was murdered at the hands of police officers calling into action a worldwide awakening of the long-standing history of anti-Blackness in the U.S. and beyond. As we continue to chapter 2, "Flights of the Imagination: Rereading/Rewriting Realities," Anzaldúa brings to mind the ways in which we are interconnected to ourselves and the world around us. The mind, body, and spirit are one and cannot

holistically or fully exist without the other. This is evident as Anzaldúa (2015) describes how, “we have different kinds of imaginings, each with similar yet different processes: a political process of imagining, a spiritual process of imagining, and an aesthetic process of imagining” (p. 44). Only then will “other epistemologies—those of the body, dreams, intuitions, and senses reach consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 44).

Anzaldúa lays a foundation to offer a counterspace, if you will, for us to critically reflect on our journeys. Throughout the book, themes of identity and transformation are blatant, bold, and brilliantly placed in each chapter. Her words challenge us to reimagine, restructure and disrupt our systems of knowing in a profound and unapologetic way. With theories and praxis such as “new tribalism” “spiritual activism” and “the Coyolxauhqui imperative” among others, Anzaldúa theorizes systems of knowing that interrogate whose knowledge and realities are accepted as a “foundational” base of knowledge. Chapter 4, “Geographies of Selves-Reimagining Identity: Nos/Otras (Us/Other), las Nепantleras, and the New Tribalism” highlights the ways in which Anzaldúa creates ruptures around identity politics. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2015) reminds us, “Identity grows out of our interactions, and we strategically reinvent ourselves to accommodate our exchanges. Identity is an ongoing story, one that changes with each telling, one we revise at each way station, each stop, in our viaje de la vida (life’s journey)” (p. 75). This becomes apparent as Anzaldúa takes us the readers on her autoethnography journey through her earlier texts and this book.

Through this timeless classic, Anzaldúa continues to offer an “intersectional genius” approach to how we navigate life and the academy. The development of this unfinished dissertation into this breathtaking book is a call to action to reimagine the ways in which we conceptualize our knowledge. Anzaldúa challenges epistemological boundaries and reveals how doing so opens up possibilities for how we can exist. Furthermore, she disrupts the western notions of objectivity, neutrality, gender norms, and the mind, body, and spirit. In turn, Anzaldúa has inspired me, a Jotería scholar/activist, to lean into the intersections of Jotería theory and praxis and redefine what it means to be queer and Latinx in the academy today. Instead of asking questions such as what is Jotería? She would encourage us to ask where does your Jotería breathe? Where does it exist? *Light in the Dark* embodies the goals of advocacy scholarship, linking research to comunidad (community), in the attempt to transform our “socialized” way of being. Anzaldúa’s work embodies who one is and requires us to grapple with our activist/scholar

role, embrace “alternative” ways of knowing, and confront those aspects of ourselves that render us the colonized and the colonizer. In other words, *Light in the Dark* and Anzaldúan activism, theory, and praxis continuously draw from experiential knowledge and builds on pedagogies of the heart.

Biographies

Shelli Rottschafer

Shelli Rottschafer completed her doctorate from the University of New Mexico in Latin American Contemporary Literature (2005). Since 2006, Rottschafer has taught at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, MI. She is a Professor of Spanish within the Department of World Languages. She teaches Spanish Language, Chicana and Latina Literature, Film and Gender Studies. Dr. Rottschafer is also the Director of the Contemporary Writers Series which invites acclaimed authors of all genres to campus.

Rottschafer has published across genres in *The Journal of Literature and Art Studies* and *Border-Lines: Journal of the Latino Research Center* at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her reviews of texts can be found in the *Rocky Mountain Modern Language Review* and *Choice: Current Reviews for Academic Libraries*. Her Creative Nonfiction and Travel Writing have been published in *Wanderlust Journal of Travel Essays* www.wanderlust-journal.com. Her poem “My Mother Had” was published in *Herbaria3.0* <https://herbaria3.org/2018/06/11/my-mother-had/>. Her novella, *Stay North* from Atmosphere Press in Austin, TX is forthcoming (2021). Her short story “Let’s Sing For Your Granma” will be published early Spring 2021 in *Chamisa: A Journal of Literacy, Performance, and Visual Arts of the Great Southwest* UNM’s Southwest Hispanic Research Institute.

Alejandra Rengifo

Alejandra Rengifo, Professor of Spanish at Central Michigan University. Specialties: Latin American and Latino culture and literature and Cultural Studies. I have published about Caribbean, Colombian, and Latino culture and literature. I teach courses in Spanish and English about Latino American and Latino Culture and Literature, and Cultural and Global Studies. Alejandra Rengifo, Professor of Spanish at Central Michigan University. Specialties: Latin American and Latino culture and literature and Cultural Studies. I have published about Caribbean, Colombian, and Latino culture and literature. I teach courses in Spanish and English about Latino American and Latino Culture and Literature, and Cultural and Global Studies.

Marie Nubia-Feliciano

Marie Nubia-Feliciano holds a PhD in Education. She also holds a master's degree in Counseling, with an emphasis in student development in higher education, as well as a bachelor's degree in Social Sciences. Her research interests focus the experiences of individuals and communities at the boundaries. She teaches part time for Chapman University and UC Irvine, where she instructs on such topics as leadership, ethics, race and ethnicity, and identity. She currently resides in Southern California with her family.

René H. Arceo

Born in Mexico in 1959, Arceo moved to Chicago in 1979. Arceo has been recognized with acquisition prizes and scholarship grants from the city of Chicago and Arts Midwest Foundation. With support from the Illinois Arts Council, he promoted and exhibited his works in Mexico, France, and Poland. In México at Galería Gabriel Flores of Universidad de Guadalajara (1990). In Poland at Galería BWA, Zamosc (2002) and the Akademickie Centrum Kultury, in Lublin (2002). In France at *Association Pour L'Estampe et l'Art Populaire* Gallery, Paris, France (2006). The Lucerne-Chicago Sister City Program awarded him an Art Residency in Lucerne, Switzerland (2018). Arceo lives in Chicago where he co-founded the Galeria Ink Works (1984-87) and the Mexican Printmaking Workshop (1990-96). He founded **Arceo Press** in 2005 to foster international collaborations among printmakers and thus far has published fourteen limited edition print portfolios with artists from Mexico, Spain, Canada, and more. Web: www.ArceoPress.com and www.Etsy.com/Shop/ArceoStudio

Ruby Barrientos

Ruby is a first-generation Salvadoran American artist born and raised in Reno, NV. She is a self-taught/independent visual artist having shown in galleries and museums locally.

She is an artist utilizing a unique artistic voice that she coined Nuwave Mayan, a style that incorporates her Salvadoran Mayan ancestry and heritage in the creation of socially relevant work.

Ruby's exhibits, talks, performances, public art, and community involvement speaks to her commitment to engaging with the public through thoughtful discussions about creating better more inclusive futures.

Karla M. Padrón

Karla M. Padrón (PhD University of Minnesota) is a jointly appointed Assistant Professor in the Center for the Study of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and the Department of Communication at Northern Illinois University. Dr. Padrón is an interdisciplinary scholar with a background in American Studies, Chicana/Latina Studies, and Critical Sexuality Studies. Her research areas are border rhetoric, transgender rights, and women of color feminisms. Using community-based participatory research methods, legal analysis, and critical ethnography, Padrón's current project examines the social conditions that transgender Latina immigrants experience in the U.S. She is also working on research exploring medical mistrust among U.S. LGBT patients and the function of intersectionality and patient-centered care within LGBT-based healthcare.

Gloria Itzel Montiel, PhD

Gloria Itzel Montiel, PhD, is a Southern California-based health community health strategist and researcher. Since 2011, she has led the acquisition of more than \$18 million in grant funds for community programs in public health, education and civic engagement. Dr. Montiel currently serves as Senior Grant Writer at the AltaMed Institute for Health Equity and as the Consulting Director of Strategy and Sustainability for Latino Health Access. In these roles, she leads the design of multi-pronged community-level strategies and initiatives to address the social determinants of health. She also teaches graduate level courses at the Claremont Graduate University, in the Allies of Dreamers Certificate Program, which prepares educators researchers and community leaders to work with undocumented students and mixed status families. Dr. Montiel, herself, is a DACA recipient, the first to obtain a PhD from the Claremont Graduate University. Her academic work has been published in the *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, the *Youth Voice Journal*, the *Handbook on Promoting Social Justice in Education*, and in various edited books.

Kyle Moon

Kyle Moon serves as a research associate at the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Evaluation Studies at the Ohio State University College of Public Health and as an undergraduate research assistant at the Lieberman Lab at the University of Notre Dame. Most recently, he led a study analyzing the outcomes of a mental health initiative during COVID-19.

Mr. Moon has also led community education sessions. His research interests include developmental neuroscience, environmental health, health policy, and community-engaged research practices.

America Bracho, MD, MPH

America Bracho, MD, MPH, is the founder, president and CEO of Latino Health Access, a *promotor-led* public health organization in Santa Ana, California and Fundación Linternita, a non-governmental and community-led economic development organization in Cachamaure, Venezuela. Prior to these roles, Dr. Bracho worked as a physician in her native Venezuela, after which she created and directed the AIDS projects for Latino family Services in Detroit, Michigan, the first of its kind at the wake of the AIDS epidemic. She is recognized internationally for her expertise in Latino health issues, community organizing, *promotor*-facilitated programs, women's health, and diabetes education. Dr. Bracho holds an MPH from the University of Michigan and an MD from the Universidad Central de Venezuela.

Nancy Mejia, MPH, MSW

Nancy Mejia, MPH, MSW, has over fifteen years of experience engaging urban, underserved communities of color in direct service, research, and policy initiatives. She currently serves as the Chief Program Officer at Latino Health Access (LHA). Since 2011, she has co-designed and co-led campaigns alongside LHA *promotores* to improve access to affordable and dignified housing, open space, community-driven development, and safe active transportation. She has provided strategic direction to civic engagement, leadership development, and policy efforts working towards health equity and building power among immigrant communities. In her current role, she oversees the processes to integrate equity into the organization's decision-making and cultivating a culture of practice that addresses the social determinants of health through direct services, activation of resident leadership, and long-term policy and systems change. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Nancy has supported the redesign and development of programming that is accessible and safe to community residents. She was previously the Deputy Director of the City University of New York Institute for Health Equity, and holds a Master of Public Health and a Master of Science in Social Work from Columbia University. She obtained a B.A. in Sociology and in Latin American Studies at UCLA. Nancy was born in El Salvador and grew up in a working-class immigrant household.

Patricia J. Cantero, PhD

Patricia J. Cantero, PhD, has 27 years of experience working in health education and prevention research projects among Latinos in San Diego, Orange and Los Angeles Counties. Twenty of those years, she has evaluated *Promotor*-led (or Community Health Workers) health education programs by merging her research background and community service in creative and practical evaluation tools. Dr. Cantero obtained her PhD in preventive medicine from the University of Southern California.

Saira Nawaz, PhD

Saira Nawaz, PhD, is a Research Evaluator with over 8 years of experience in data analysis, impact evaluation, and cost-effectiveness analysis in public health. She currently works as an Evaluator with the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Evaluation Studies at Ohio State University. In this role, she leads a mapping and visualization project to assess the impact of reproductive health policies and social determinants of health on Ohio's county-level pregnancy and maternal mortality rates, contraception preferences, and medical care use. She has also recently joined the PATH team to support the evaluation of the Prospective Country Evaluation of Global Fund's investments in the DRC and Senegal. Dr. Nawaz has advanced statistical and programming experience in Stata and SAS to analyze healthcare claims, population health surveys, and monitoring/performance data. She works conducts community-informed research and evaluation using methods such as Human Centered Design.

Sergio A. Gonzalez, PhD

Sergio A. Gonzalez is a PhD candidate in the School of Educational Studies Department and Dual Master of Arts student in the Applied Gender Studies Program at Claremont Graduate University. As the proud hijo de a first-generation Madre and Mexican Immigrant Padre, Joto, Latinx, feminist, Jotería scholar and activist, Sergio focuses on co-creating counternarratives of queer Latinx/a/o individuals within higher education. Sergio earned his M.Ed. in Postsecondary Administration and Student Affairs from the University of Southern California (USC) and his B.A. in Communication Studies from Manhattanville College. His research interests focus around Jotería pedagogy, education equity, social justice, undocumented/DACAmented students and Queer Latinx students in higher education.



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