Editorial

Cultures of resistance: Another world is in the making...

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The mass social movements around the world – from Tunisia, Egypt and Libya to Puerto Rico, Wisconsin and Ohio – are encouraging in various ways. They presage a change, a struggle for – rather than against – our own humanity – indeed, a declaration of war against the inhumanity that for the past few decades seems to have held hostage, people's hopes, dreams and expectations. The seeds of resistance have sprouted into various forms of protest, and today hold the promise of forging a new culture of human dignity (Baroud, 2010).

For the hundreds of thousands who are struggling against the greed of the wealthy and the powerful in the world, the peaceful protests are an affirmation of people's right to have rights, a rejection of the rules and regulations that, in practice, herald people's redundancy and disposability. We saw the early stirrings of this resistance in the United States in 2006, when millions of Latino/as took to the streets to demand that human dignity be respected. Despite the involvement of thousands of working people, the marches of 2006–2007 were neither for higher wages nor for better working conditions. They were instead a call for the recognition of people's dignity and humanity – marking the repudiation of the criminalization of honest hard work in our society. As John Betancur and Maricela Garcia argue in this issue, mass action and the organizational capacity of the community itself, rather than formal organizations, ultimately directed the immigrant rights movements and ensured their significance. They were the expressions of what Edward Said defined as a “culture” of resistance, that is, “culture [as] a way of fighting against extinction and obliteration” (in Baroud, 2010).

Today, in Wisconsin as in other parts of the world, we are witnessing similar actions, a similar organizational capacity born of the affirmation of human dignity. It is a movement energized by hundreds of thousands of people who in that state, as well as across the country, are insisting on their right to have rights. Like Latino/as in Arizona and elsewhere – who continue to resist draconian legislation grounded in hate and exclusion, to mobilize and call for comprehensive immigration reform legalization, for the reunification of families, the right to go to college, workplace rights and civil liberties for all – working men and women of

Wisconsin too are seeking, in Betancur and Garcia's words, "support for reform everywhere they (can)."

Undoubtedly we are in a different era than that of the 1960s movements for Civil Rights; it is an era in which the youth, in particular, have transcended the polarizing left and right of the past in search of the affirmation of their (our) humanity and belonging. This search – and affirmation – is certainly present in their individual acts of courage throughout the country – whether in those of undocumented Latino/a youth who are coming out of the shadows to insist on the passage of the DREAM Act – a symbol of their right to belonging – or of youth like the environmentalist, Tim DeChristopher, who are single-handedly declaring war on those who are destroying our common future. Indeed, Latino/a youth and others are challenging to varying extents and in different ways and realms, the prevailing cultural norms on both the left and the right.

Urayoán Noel's essay suggests that despite differences, the young Nuyorican poets of the post 1990s slam-era generation do show some cultural and aesthetic continuities with the Nuyorican poetry movements of the 1960s; according to Noel, more than establishing radical breaks, the works of today's young poets seek the *negotiation* of "a middle ground between 1960s- and 1970s-style anti-colonialism and post 1960s market pragmatism." Hence, Noel argues, "the work of these poets suggests that the difference between the founding Nuyorican poetries of the 1960s and 1970s and the so-called 'post-Nuyorican' or 'Diasporican' poetries of the 1990s and beyond ... should not occlude important continuities that allow us to conceive of a Nuyorican aesthetics, on and off the page, from the 1960s to the present."

Certainly, as Noel suggests, the transcendent permanence and the continuities of culture cannot be under-estimated, and its power in terms of both its liberating and repressive ramifications must be recognized. As Lawrence Goodwyn (1978) explained more than 30 years ago, in the United States, the masses traditionally do not rebel because they have been "culturally organized not to rebel." This has had serious consequences for our experience and understanding of Democracy itself, despite official rhetoric to the contrary.

Sarita Gaytán engages the significance of culture in terms of the consumption of commodities and uses her analysis of the transnational consumption of tequila to discuss the ways that consumption structures collective identities and relations, and cultural practices, simultaneously reinforcing the past even while (re)shaping the present. She argues for more recognition of the significance of "commodities and their consumption as potential sites for understanding the nuances of how individuals manage complex webs of relations that have cultural, social, and political implications."

Key to understanding what is at stake in the mobilizations of the current period is the organization of race in structuring labor dynamics and hierarchies in the United States. Undoubtedly, as Rosaura Sánchez argues in her essay in

El Foro, there is today a framing “master narrative” of xenophobia that now serves to locate immigrants in the American imaginary, “as threats to a particular way of life,” forcing Latinos into the position of scapegoats in the broader narrative, understanding and practices of those who seek to explain – to justify – the current social and economic neoliberalism that is so successfully (re)structuring US society and expectations.

That the underlying premise of this master narrative of xenophobia, particularly against Latino/as, is grounded more in racism, than in legal status, can be easily verified by research on the impact that the presence of Puerto Rican citizens might have in contributing to “white flight” in specific cities. Michael Sacks’ analysis of the gentrification process in two northeastern cities suggests that the resulting “ethnic group segregation was influenced by the Puerto Rican presence, even when controlling for the economic status of Hispanics.” Certainly, as Rosaura Sánchez correctly points out, “In each and every case of scapegoating the circumstances are different; the conditions that give rise to them are different, and the state, in modern times in particular, has specific ties to the practice of scapegoating or, more precisely, to the production of a given xenophobia narrative.”

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, *The New York Times* published a searing description and critique of the racially segregating labor practices at a pork production slaughterhouse in Springfield, North Carolina, ostensibly the largest in the world (LeDuff, 2000). The labor practices at the Springfield slaughterhouse followed the traditional racially hierarchized job distribution – with Whites having supervisory roles and Native Americans having “clean” menial jobs, leaving the worst menial jobs for Blacks and Mexicans. The cultural implications for both the workplace and the factory of the use of race in the divide and conquer strategy in labor relations cannot be ignored. As the author noted, “While Smithfield’s profits nearly doubled in the past year, wages have remained flat ... But more than management, the workers see one another as the problem, and they see the competition in skin tones. The locker rooms are self-segregated and so is the cafeteria. The enmity spills out into the towns. The races generally keep to themselves. Along Interstate 95 there are four tumbledown bars, one for each color: white, black, red and brown. Language is also a divider” (LeDuff, 2000). In this respect, it is interesting to see the extent to which racial practices in the labor market have changed in the past decade, with the definitive shift from manufacturing to service sector employment in cities such as New York. Norma Fuentes-Mayorga’s article shows that today “racial sorting” takes place beyond the reach of labor legislation, as “employers use race, gender and immigrant status to position workers in front or back stage jobs, depending on the extent of their interaction with mainstream clientele.” The use of race as a means of perpetuating divide and conquer strategies, reinforces and at least partially exemplifies the process by which the masses continue to be “culturally organized not to rebel.”

Still, as we begin the second decade of the twenty-first century, what is perhaps most encouraging is that throughout the world, youth, students, workers and their supporters are increasingly pushing back against the virulent corporate onslaught of the recent past. In the United States, there are growing numbers of community-based organizations and centers for workers' advocacy, popular education and political campaigns, such as that described by Michelle Téllez, Cristina Sanidad and Nicolas de la Fuente, in this issue's *VIVENCIAS: Reports from the field* section. These centers contribute to build a "movement of workers, community members, communities of faith and students in order to effect change in the lives of workers, largely undocumented migrants."

Citizens, immigrants, workers and students and their allies in the United States are taking a stand. In Puerto Rico, student protests that began in April of 2010 against the cancelation of waivers at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR), which currently serves over 65 000 students, have today, one year later, mushroomed into a broad and diversified social movement to address the government's neoliberal policies, including privatization, austerity measures, firings, University program and other cuts, and new tuition and other fees. One woman explained her participation in the following terms, "I'm conservative and I work for this government ... But I grew up in a small town, and I owe my economic betterment to my UPR education, and my children were also educated here," pointing to the campus where heavily armed policemen were stationed. "What the government is doing is just plain wrong," (Stanchich, 2011).

Similarly, in Arizona, students, youth, teachers and their supporters in the community are protesting the closure of Ethnic Studies programs in the schools of that state, a sign of the state government's efforts to further marginalize and exclude people of Mexican descent – again, regardless of legal status. HB 2281, the Arizona bill that effectively bans the teaching of Ethnic Studies came into effect on 1 January 2011. Will it too spread to other parts of the country, like Arizona's SB 1070 has? As Randall Amster correctly points out, "Whereas SB 1070 focused primarily on the ostensible control of bodies, HB 2281 is predominantly about controlling minds" (Amster, 2010) and, therefore, these protests involve the very being of their participants. In this respect, they are then true precursors of a nascent culture.

Like the current international mobilizations and the significant acts of courage of various groups and individuals in the United States, the actions, both individual and collective, of Latino/as need to be acknowledged – whether in their challenges to neoliberalism, the political war they are waging against the culture of disposability imposed on Latino/as in various arenas, and their repudiation of the "master narrative of xenophobia" that as Sánchez describes, increasingly frames and encompasses the nation's imaginary.

These acts merit our full support, particularly the twenty-first century youth protests. It is essential that we all take a stand – for justice, for human dignity, for our common future – and that we make our contribution to the unfolding of

this culture of resistance. For genuine collective resistance is “a culmination of experiences that unite the individual to the collective, their conscious and subconscious, their relationships with their immediate surroundings and with that which is not so immediate, all colliding and exploding into a fury that cannot be suppressed” (Baroud, 2010) – but without which “democracy” remains either a purely formal legalistic concept or a distant mirage.

Saludos!

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