Editorial

New directions in Latino studies

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The field of Latino studies continues to evolve and engage with new research questions, methodologies and theoretical perspectives. For instance, Latino studies was initially based on the study of Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Cubans but has grown to include many other groups. More recent migrations from Central American and indigenous communities have necessitated extensive conversations about the meaning of *Latinidad*, intra-Latino relations and interactions across communities of color in new spaces. Latinos are now found in all 50 states and as this demographic expands to more destinations, the east and west coast bias of our field has been interrupted. Similarly, while transnationalism has been a central concern of Latino studies for decades, our understanding of this process has shifted as we have examined diverse Latino populations undergoing transnational movements in the current era. And in terms of approaches to Latino studies, comparative ethnic studies and gender studies offer valuable lenses that encourage us to shift our optics to enrich our knowledge. The articles in this issue artfully exemplify some of these new directions in Latino studies.

To begin with, Rebecca Hester's essay considers how service providers are trained to work with indigenous populations in California. She argues that despite good intentions, cultural competency training inadequately educates people about indigenous communities since it rarely grapples with structural inequality. The trainings tend to reproduce simplistic, homogenized representations of indigenous people that reinforce rather than question the status quo. For example, such trainings fail to analyze the role of the United States in motivating the migration of indigenous migrants, or the failure of US labor laws and health policies to address their issues. Trainings tend to focus on changing personal attitudes rather than acknowledging systemic inequities and discussing what providers can do to enact change.

Discussing another community that too often is neglected in Latino studies, Karen Tejada sheds light on how Salvadorans who had to flee their countries of origin because of political persecution in the 1980s use their experiences as long-term activists to wage shifting battles in post-war El Salvador and the United States. Using a framework of "political habitus," Tejada describes how

these seasoned activists develop a transnational approach that enables them to use their skills and experience to advocate for their people both in the United States and in their homeland. These activists adapt to the new political reality in El Salvador, as they confront right wing governments that are trying to capitalize on migrants' remittances for their own purposes; concurrently, they also advocate for immigrant rights for Salvadoran communities in Washington, DC.

Next, using a Lacanian lens, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel close-reads a pivotal scene in *Down These Mean Streets* to interrogate complexities of race and identity. Her reading puts Piri Thomas in conversation with other writers and exemplifies the value of reading Latino studies works within a broader network of Afro-Caribbean, European and American thinkers on colonial and racialized identities. This deft bridging of texts from multiple genres and diverse histories of knowledge is a fruitful exercise that highlights linkages among this disparate group of thinkers (including Piri Thomas, Isabel Zenón, Frantz Fanon, and Richard Rodriguez) around issues of brownness and makes a compelling argument for approaching Latino works within a comparative racial and ethnic studies framework.

Also, exploring racialized discourses of identity, Patricia Silver examines, among other issues, the place of Blackness in competing identification practices of Puerto Ricans from the island and the mainland. At stake for Silver is the question of how understandings of sameness and difference affect the possibility of alliance building in Orlando, Florida, a new destination for Puerto Ricans. Here, in addition to navigating racial and class differences among their own nationality, Puerto Rican migrants negotiate their relationship to other Latino communities and an emerging panethnic consciousness. Through an analysis of cultural representations by Puerto Rican and Latino artists that rely on Puerto Rican iconography, Silver examines the tensions that arise as evolving Latino communities are forged and contested.

Kasey Butcher rounds out the articles in this issue with an analysis of fictional and journalistic narratives about femicide in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. She takes issue with how the murdered girls are represented in many of these accounts. Butcher argues that, similarly to class, and race, girlhood is also a constructed category, and so we need to be more questioning of our depiction of girlhood in accounts of the victimization in Mexico. Butcher notes that girlhood in these accounts is read through a white-middle class lens that does not speak to the reality of girlhood in Mexico. Needed, argues Butcher, is a more complex analysis focused on the complex economic and social power relations that condition the lives of girls and young women in Mexico and that recognizes their agency, as well as their efforts to protect and speak for themselves.

Our Vivencias essay offers an analysis of Puerto Rican murals in Philadelphia. Stacey Van Dahm begins the important work of archiving these understudied murals in order to highlight their contribution to the development of a panethnic Latino community in this particular site. She demonstrates

how the Mural Arts Program has contributed to the revitalization of Latino communities in Philadelphia and serves to educate all as to Puerto Rican contributions to the city.

As they offer novel takes on familiar issues, or expand our understanding of new contexts, all the essays in this issue contribute to the development of Latino studies in the twenty-first century. Enjoy!

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